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AUSTIN CLARE

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Fiction, English
Johnson, Spinning, 1624-1720
-Fiction

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THE CARVED CARTOON

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THE FIRST WORK OF ART.

p. 14.

The Carved Cartoon. *Frontispiece.*

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THE CARVED CARTOON:

A PICTURE OF THE PAST

BY

AUSTIN CLARE

AUTHOR OF

"THE ROYAL BANNER," "A LOCAL LION," "STANDARD BEARERS," ETC., ETC

"Soll das Werk den Meister loben;
Dock der Segen kommt von oben."
SCHILLER—"*Song of the Bell.*"

"The work shall the Master glorify,
Yet the blessing cometh from on high."
(Translation.)

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INTRODUCTION

" Vanished is the ancient splendour, and before my dreamy eye
Wave these mingling shapes and figures, like a faded tapestry."
LONGFELLOW—" Nüremberg."

ANY one who has looked at all closely into the great historical tapestry which is continually being woven in the mighty loom of ages must have observed, among the more prominent figures which throng its surface, others much less distinctly wrought, which are yet too closely interwoven with the fabric entirely to escape notice. Unlike the great kings, statesmen, and warriors, whose actions, taking immediate and powerful effect on the world in which they lived, have caused their portraits to be wrought in strong colours on the very fore-front of history, these men, by the more unobtrusive character of their lives and occupations, have left but little trace of their presence. When, therefore, the world, suddenly awakening to the real merits of the men who have been living unnoticed in its very midst, comes to inquire curiously into the origin and early lives of its new-found treasures, behold, the weavers of history have omitted to record them, or so casually that all traces of their presence have nearly faded away! Men like these may be said to live much more in the imperishable works which they have left behind them than in their actual existence as creatures of flesh and blood like ourselves; so much has the life of the artist been absorbed in that which he has created.

Grinling Gibbons, the great wood carver, of whose unrivalled works England may be justly proud, is a

33x192

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notable case in point. But his lot was cast in such stirring times, and the faint traces of his life are crossed by the threads of so many distinguished and well-known characters, that it has occurred to me that, by uniting the scattered threads of information into one web, binding them together, and filling up the faded outlines with a little of the fresh colour of fiction, a picture might be woven from the dim designs still visible on the old historical tapestry, which, like the restoration of some work of antiquity, should serve to give a clearer idea of the life probably led by our great carver. Before setting up my loom, however, I will follow the example of antiquarians with their restored antediluvian animals, and give you the fragments out of which I have constructed my picture, side by side with the picture itself.

Evelyn's Diary and Walpole's "Catalogue of Painters" are almost the only sources of information which we have concerning this famous man, and the scanty witness which they afford does not correspond in every particular; but by combining the two, as Allan Cunningham has done for his sketch of Gibbons in "Lives of British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects," we may be able to arrive at something like the truth, so far as it can be known Here therefore is the rough outline, such as it really stands.

Grinling Gibbons was, according to some authorities,* born in Holland of English parents; according to others,† his father was a Dutchman, while he himself was born in Spur Alley, in the Strand. The probability seems to be that the artist was a Londoner, descended (like Sir J. Reynolds) through his mother from a Dutch family. His first work of which we hear was a pot of flowers, executed while living in Belle

* Murray. † Stoakes.

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Sauvage Court, Ludgate Hill, of so delicate a nature that the "leaves quivered and shook with the motion of the passing coaches." Here also he seems to have been employed in decorating Dorset Garden Theatre. The next notice of him occurs in Evelyn's Diary, dated Jan. 18th, 1670–1:

"This day I first acquainted his Majesty with that incomparable young man Gibbons, whom I had lately met with in an obscure place by mere accident, as I was walking near a poor solitary thatched house in a field in our parish (Deptford), near Sayes Court. I found him shut in; but, looking in at the window, I perceived him carving that large cartoon or crucifix of Tintoretto, a copy of which I had myself brought from Venice, where the original painting remains. I asked if I might enter; he opened the door civilly to me, and I saw him about such a work as for the curiosity of handling, drawing, and studious exactness I had never before seen in all my travels. I questioned him why he worked in such an obscure and lonesome place; he told me it was that he might apply himself to his profession without interruption, and wondered not a little how I had found him out. I asked him if he was unwilling to be made known to some great man, for that I believed it might turn to his profit; he answered, he was yet but a beginner, but would not be sorry to sell off that piece: on demanding the price, he said £100. In good earnest the very frame was worth the money, there being nothing in nature so tender and delicate as the flowers and festoons about it, and yet the work was very strong; in the piece were more than 100 figures of men, etc. I found he was likewise musical, and very civil, sober, and discreet in his discourse. There was only an old woman in the house. So, desiring leave to visit him sometimes, I went away"

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Evelyn goes on to say that he spoke of the young artist to the King, and begged leave to bring him to Whitehall. Also that on Feb. 19th there dined with him "Mr. Surveyor, Dr. Christopher Wren, and Mr. Pepys, Clerk of the Acts, two extraordinary ingenious and knowing persons," whom he "carried to see the piece of carving recommended to the King."

Then follows the account of Gibbons' presentation. "*March* 1.—I caused Mr. Gibbons to bring to Whitehall his excellent piece of carving, where, being come, I advertised his Majesty, who asked me where it was. I told him in Sir Richard Browne's (my father-in-law) chamber, and that if it pleased his Majesty to appoint whither it should be brought, being large and, though of wood, heavy, I would take care for it.

"'No,' says the King; 'show me the way: I'll go to Sir Richard's chamber.' Which he immediately did, walking along the entries after me as far as the ewrie, till he came into the room where I also lay. No sooner was he entered and cast his eye on the work but he was astonished at the curiosity of it, and having considered it a long while, and discoursed with Mr. Gibbons, whom I brought to kiss his hand, he commanded it should immediately be carried to the Queen's side to show her. It was carried up into her bed-chamber, where she and the King looked on and admired it again. The King, being called away, left us with the Queen, believing she would have bought it, it being a Crucifix; but when his Majesty was gone a French peddling-woman, one Madame de Boord, who used to bring petticoats and fans and baubles out of France to the ladies, began to find fault with several things in the work, of which she understood no more than an ass or a monkey; so in a kind of indignation I caused the person who

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brought it to carry it back to the chamber, finding the Queen so much governed by an ignorant Frenchwoman, and this incomparable artist had his labour only for his pains, which not a little displeased me, and he was fain to send it down to the cottage again. He not long after sold it for £80, though well worth £100 without the frame, to Sir George Viner. His Majesty's surveyor, Dr. Wren, faithfully promised me to employ him, I having also bespoke his Majesty for his work at Windsor, which my friend Mr. May, the architect there, was going to alter and repair universally."

Mr. Walpole adds that Gibbons "lived at Deptford, in the same house with the musician, where the beneficent Mr. Evelyn found and patronised them both. . . . Gibbons in gratitude made a present of his own bust in wood to Mr. Evelyn." He says also that "the piece that had struck so good a judge was a large carving in wood of St. Stephen stoned, long preserved in the sculptor's own house, and afterwards purchased and placed by the Duke of Chandos at Cannons." Evelyn, however, expressly states that the carving was a "*Crucifix*"; and he, being an eye-witness, seems more deserving of credit. I have been unable to learn the exact description of this work, or whether it is still in existence.

This is about all we know of the actual life of the great carver, but pages might be filled with the description of his exquisite works, which abound all over England. Charles II. gave him a place in the Board of Works, and George I. appointed him Master Carver in Wood, with a salary of 1s. 6d. per day, which he enjoyed till his death in Bow Street, Covent Garden, August 3rd, 1721.

Dr. Burnett and Signor Nicolao are both real characters, the former mentioned by Pepys, the latter by Evelyn.

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Of the other parts of the picture, it only remains to say that the scene in St. Paul's, in which I have introduced the figure of Gibbons, is taken from Mr. Evelyn's Diary, August 27th, 1666, and that on the sailors' rising from several of the same nature mentioned in Pepys' Diary. In describing the Plague and Fire, I have woven together the various materials so plentifully furnished by De Foe, Evelyn, and Pepys, giving preference to the latter where accounts differed, as having written his notes at the end of each day, while still fresh in his memory, which cannot be said of the other two. The Plague,* which began to show itself in London towards the end of the year 1664, appears to have been brought over in a ship from Holland; and I have no direct authority for making the London mob accuse the Roman Catholics of causing it by poisoning the waters. But the fact that other outbreaks of the disease have been thus attributed to whatever body of men happened to be under popular suspicion at the time, combined with the known ill-feeling towards the Roman Catholics during the reign of Charles II., makes this by no means improbable. Indeed, the author of the "Craftsman" says that "it seems wonderful that the Plague was not as peremptorily imputed to the Papists as the Fire," which at that time was universally charged upon them, as the inscription on the Monument testified. Now, however, that popular feeling has cooled, there seems little doubt that this latter calamity was wholly accidental, though greatly aggravated by the carelessness of the authorities.

And now that we have thus separated the threads of truth and fiction——

CLARGHYLL, *April*, 1878.

* De Foe, p. 165.

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THE CARVED CARTOON

CHAPTER I

A London Street Two Hundred Years Ago

" A wanderer from a region far away,
As he paced thy streets and court-yards, sang in thought his careless lay."

LONGFELLOW—" Nüremberg."

LET me show you a picture of the past—a street in the City of London two hundred years ago.

It is a very narrow street, with tall, many-storied houses lifting their high heads up, up into the blue sky—bluer then than now, for London was not then the smoky place it is at the present day. Still, however, there is but a very narrow strip of that same blue sky to be seen, for the stories of the houses project one beyond the other, till the old gossips at the upper windows might shake hands across the street, and enjoy a comfortable chat about affairs in general, and those of their neighbours in particular, without taking the trouble to stir from their own arm-chairs. There is plenty of carving about those old houses, clustering round the strangely shaped old windows, where the pert town sparrows build among the wooden leaves, and rear their young ones as comfortably as their rural cousins can do among the green ones in the country, and decorating the tops of the heavy balconies, where court ladies once sat in their rich robes of velvet, and gold and silver stuffs, and looked down on the gay spectacle of Queen Bess going in progress

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through the streets of her good town of London. Now, however, the stream of fashionable life has already flowed away, leaving our street to traders and artisans. The balconies are not, however, without ornament. Here is one over the shop of a cloth-mercer, from whose rails depend various pieces of cloth of goodly colours—scarlet, blue, violet, and green, for the reign of the Roundheads is still fresh in men's minds, and the violent revulsion of taste has caused all sad hues to be eschewed. In another balcony flourish some pots of old-fashioned flowers, whose names are now almost forgotten, but which look green and fresh in the dark old street. Here is a wicker cage hanging out at an upper window, in which a saucy magpie is screaming out pert remarks on the passers-by, who look up astonished to see where the voice comes from; for there is plenty of movement, even in this dark, narrow street. There is a brace of court gallants strolling along arm in arm, all bravely bedecked in silks and velvets, and fluttering with gay knots of ribbon, their long rapiers clattering by their sides, and their snowy plumes waving in the wind. Here comes a citizen's daughter, in cloak and wimple, escorted by her father's apprentice, armed with a stout cudgel. Then, with a loud "Place, place for my Lady!" comes a party of serving-men, pushing the crowd right and left to make way for their mistress, who sits in her litter, flirting her fan and petting her lap-dog. And the busy traders; the work-soiled artisans; the buyers and sellers at the open shops, on the ground floors of the quaint old houses; the 'prentices vaunting their masters' wares and inviting custom at the top of their voices; the portly civic dignities; the plump citizens' wives—how shall I describe them all? They are too many for me. You

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must sketch them in, according to your own fancy, as they pass along our old street, while a stray sunbeam slanting down from above falls across the motley groups and the antique houses, till the whole scene looks like one of Rembrandt's pictures.

There is one other figure in the street, however, which I would fain draw for you—a figure that looks as though he had no part nor lot in all the stir and movement around him, as he stands leaning against an archway, motionless as one of the carved figures overhead. His eyes, however, are by no means motionless; quick, bead-black eyes they are, which wander up and down among the crowd, and seem to be taking every one's measure, as the saying is. Yet there is a wistful, half-bewildered look about them which seems to tell us, as is indeed the case, that their owner is far from his home, alone in a strange land. But indeed we might have found out that without the help of those quick black eyes. The dark, olive complexion, the picturesque, foreign-looking costume, and, last of all, the monkey on his shoulder and the violin on his arm, all bespeak him a wandering Savoyard.

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CHAPTER II

In Perils in the City

"Borne onward, I among the multitude was swept."
SHELLEY—"The Triumph of Life."

HOWEVER much the little musician might enjoy thus lazily basking in the sun, his monkey did not seem equally to approve of this manner of wasting time, for it nibbled his shoulder gently by way of reminder and passed its little hairy paw softly over its master's face.

"*Eh, Filippo mio,*" murmured the boy, in the soft language of his far-away home, "dost want something to eat, *carissimo*?* Ah! well, we must earn it first, for I haven't a single mite left to buy anything with. Come, *amico mio,*† we'll try if a tune will draw a few copper pieces from these islanders."

The boy tightened the strings of his violin, drew his bow over them tenderly and caressingly, as though he loved the instrument, and were coaxing it to speak to him; then, as the long, soft notes died away, he paused a moment, and glided into one of the wild, passionate melodies of his southern home.

A crowd began to gather round in twos and threes, irresistibly attracted by the sweet sounds; and coin after coin found its way into the musician's hat, which Filippo was carrying round. Presently the boy stopped, smiled and bowed to his audience, and, addressing the monkey in Italian, began playing a spirited national dance. Filippo deposited the hat

* Dearest. † My friend.

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at his master's feet, executed one or two bounds in the air, then, with an address and agility wonderful to behold, began threading the mazes of the tarantella. Suddenly the monkey came to a sudden halt, and, with teeth grinning with rage, darted jabbering towards a little urchin, whose fingers were making a stealthy voyage of discovery into the musician's hat. Filippo seized the child, and would have inflicted a summary punishment, had not its cries brought its mother to the rescue. The woman, enraged by the assault on her child, seized the little animal, and flung it roughly from her, exclaiming:

"Eh, my masters, will ye stand by to see an innocent child murdered by a beast belonging to one of those outlandish Papists? It's time we put them down, the pestilent vermin. Who but they have poisoned the waters, and brought the plague among us? Well, Master Foster, I do wonder to see you stand so calmly there, you who lost a child no longer ago than last week through this awful death. Why, I shouldn't wonder if this very fellow is a spy of the Papists!"

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if there's some truth in that," said another; "for my goodman was told this morning by his brother's wife, that her cousin had heard from a friend, that a lad he described as being very like this one here, was seen, no longer ago than yesterday, throwing something into the river; and who can say but what it was some of the poison which is destroying us all?"

"Mistress Goodman," said a man near, a dapper dandy, in an elaborately curled and perfumed wig, "this gives us a clue, which ought not to be neglected. My wonder is that the King's Majesty has not taken the matter up long ago; but, seeing it

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is not his gracious pleasure, I see not why we should not do our poor best to trace this dark plot to its source. If something is not done soon," he added, dropping his consequential tone, and sinking into a melancholy whine, "if something is not done soon, I and all the Guild of Peruke Makers are likely to starve, for no one dares to buy our wigs, for fear they should be made of the hair of the plague-stricken. Not that *I* would ever try to profit myself by such an unlawful practice! But what think you, good people? He may have some of the very poison upon him!"

"Eh! what do you say? Some of the poison upon him! We'll soon find out! And if——O my little lad, my little Paul! if he's one of *your* murderers, then he may pray God have mercy on him, for he'll find little from me!"

These words were spoken, or rather muttered between set teeth and livid lips, by the man who had been addressed as Master Foster. He was a tall, powerful man, in a seaman's dress, with a dark face, gaunt and hollow with grief, for he had just returned from a voyage to find his child dead of the pestilence, which was just beginning its ravages in London. As he spoke, he made a movement towards the Savoyard, who shrank hastily back towards the wall. For a moment the boy quailed with a sudden terror at the angry faces and menacing words he but half understood. For a moment his eyes glanced wildly round, but, seeing no means of escape, he steadied himself with quick resolution, and, drawing up his slight figure, faced the surging crowd.

"Signori," he said, in a voice which trembled a little; "Signori——" A shout drowned the feeble voice.

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"Their very language! Do you think we understand your jargon, boy? Speak English, or nothing at all." But in his bewildered fear the boy could scarce recall the few words he had learned of the language of his persecutors; his dark face turned very white, and his voice quivered sadly, as he tried again, in broken accents:

"Messieurs, of grace—what will you? What have I done? For pity!"

"No more of the gibberish! Search him!" roared the crowd.

"Aye, aye, mates, that will I," returned the sailor, once more making a clutch at the boy. He did not succeed, however, in catching more than his vest, which was torn open as the boy sprang aside, and a small ivory crucifix, attached to his neck by a slender silver chain, fell from it, and swung forward. At this sight the crowd uttered a yell, and the sailor, catching at the chain, wrenched asunder the slight links, and, holding the crucifix up to view, exclaimed:

"What say you now, good people? This shows pretty well what crew he belongs to."

"Their very sign! Come, boy, confess at once, or we'll find a way to make thee!"

"Aye, will we," cried Foster, seizing the little Italian in his powerful grasp; "and meanwhile away with this idolatrous image! Here goes!" And suiting the action to the words, he tossed the crucifix at the feet of the crowd, who immediately trampled it in the dust. With a sob, as of pain, the boy covered his face with his hands, and the tears trickled from between his brown fingers.

"It was my mother's," he murmured, brokenly, "my poor mother's."

But the crowd heeded him not. Stung to madness

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by the scourge that was among them—the terrible pestilence which was robbing them of children, wives, husbands, and parents, and which designing persons, for their own evil ends, were but too ready to charge on the persecuted party, the unoffending Roman Catholics—they cared not for the grief of the lonely stranger; he was one of the suspected, and that was enough to rob him of all pity.

"To the river!" was now the cry. "We'll see if a ducking will make him confess!" And in a mighty wave the crowd swept away, bearing their victim with them. Like a hunted animal, the boy cast one terrified glance around. Would no one help him? Alas! among that sea of human faces he met not one that was not scowling upon him in blind rage. The dark piteous eyes were raised higher towards the calm blue sky, and a mute cry of despair went up to Heaven:

"O God, have mercy on me! Dear Lord, have pity!"

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CHAPTER III

A Patron of Art

"*Shyloch.*—Thou stickest a dagger in me: I shall never see my gold again; fourscore ducats at a sitting! fourscore ducats!"

SHAKESPEARE—"Merchant of Venice."

AND now for a while we must leave our little Savoyard, go back some few hours on the clock's dial, and look into a tiny room, a room very high up in one of the tall houses in Belle Sauvage Court, where sits a lad at work on a carved bracket.

He has been working from early morning, and now, though it is past noon and all the good people of London are taking their midday rest, and enjoying their dinner, his head is still bent down and his fingers busily employed. It is beautiful work on which they are engaged, and the boy's whole soul seems in it. All through the long morning hours, and indeed for weeks past, leaf after leaf has been growing under his skilful touch, and acorn after acorn, with stem, nut, and capsule complete, has sprung as by magic from the hard wood, and clustered in careless grace around the splendid antlered head which looks out so proudly startled, from their midst. At length the carving instruments were laid down, and with a sigh, half of relief, half of satisfaction, the lad leaned back in his chair and looked contentedly at the result of his labours. The bracket was finished.

"Well," he said to himself, "well, it is done at last. I only hope Master Simeon will be satisfied. It doesn't look amiss, I think. I wonder how much

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it is worth? Not that Master Simeon will give me *that;* but whatever it is, it will be welcome, for I haven't a farthing left; well, we shall soon see." He pushed back his chair, carefully wrapped up the carving, and began to descend the long flights of stairs which led into the street.

After passing through several streets and lanes, he turned into a quiet court, of which old-clothes-men and money-lenders seemed to be the principal inhabitants. But it was in none of these shops that the lad's business lay, for he passed them by, and stopping at a closed door at the extreme end of the court, he knocked.

"Enter," exclaimed a voice within, and the young carver opened the door and went in. The room in which he found himself was very dimly lighted; so little daylight indeed found its way through the small cobwebbed window, that but for a lamp hanging from the ceiling, the contents of the room would have been hard to distinguish. These consisted of a strange medley of ancient curiosities and works of art. Here an inlaid cabinet; there a piece of china, cracked and skilfully held together by brass rivets; in one corner a pile of old armour; in another a table, with a tray containing a rare collection of antique coins. Old pictures, dim and coated with dust, leaned with their faces to the wall, their gilt frames so covered with spiders'-webs as scarce to be visible; while equally old books were piled on shelves above them. In the midst of this litter sat a young girl at a small table, with pen and ink before her, adding up column after column of crabbed figures. A golden arrow gleamed among the coils of her rich black hair, which contrasted forcibly with the pale olive of the face it framed, and the dead white of the little hand which

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held the pen. Her dress, a strange, foreign-looking mixture of yellow, black, and scarlet, was of rich but evidently well-worn materials, and the clasps which held the bodice were of rare and ancient workmanship.

"Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen," she murmured; "that makes twenty marks. So much from the Earl of Rochester. For gold-work delivered to order, my Lord of Sandwich, £15. For curiously inlaid cabinet, owing from Sir A. Paulett, £10. Delivered and paid for, 12.—Your pardon, Master Gibbons," she said, suddenly breaking off and lifting a pair of deep, dark, lustrous eyes—eyes which looked singularly thoughtful and earnest for her almost childish years; "your pardon: I was near forgetting your presence. Do you wish to see my father?"

"An' it please you, Mistress Leah. I have brought the carved bracket he entrusted me to execute."

"Oh, let me see it!" she exclaimed, jumping from her seat and coming forward with almost childish eagerness. "Ah, it is lovely—beautiful," she continued, as the young carver uncovered his work, and with pardonable pride pointed out the wonders of delicate leafage that clustered in such high relief around the proud head. "Ah, yes, such work must surely be worth more than anything of the kind we have in the shop. 'Tis most beautiful. His lordship cannot fail to be pleased. In truth 'tis wondrous beautiful."

"What is beautiful?" asked the master of the shop, a dirty, bent old man, with long, untrimmed beard, and sharp, greedy-looking eyes, which twinkled disagreeably from under a mass of white eyebrow. "What is beautiful?" he repeated, emerging from some den behind the shop; and, coming up to our hero, he took the carving in his hand and peered

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curiously at it with his little grey eyes. They twinkled. "Yes, yes, very fair," he said at length; "'tis by no means amiss; yet methinks the stag's eyes are *a trifle* too wide open, a very trifle, you know—still——"

"But, Master Simeon," returned the young carver, courteously, "this figures a stag who hears the sound of the hunters; he is startled. And in fear, remember, the eyes are wider open than at other times."

"Well, well, well, that may be," answered the old man, who had meanwhile been closely examining the bracket, in search of something else to depreciate. Apparently he found this difficult, for he made a long pause, which he filled up with hemming and hawing, before he spoke again.

"But, Master Gibbons, it seems to me that—that—I fancy—in a word, are there not rather too many acorns among the leaves to be quite true to nature—*quite* true, you know?"

The young artist smiled good-humouredly; he knew too well what all this depreciation of his work meant, and was too much accustomed to it to feel hurt.

"Well, Master Simeon," he replied, "I am sorry if the acorns be too many for you. But I have seen full as many on the trees in his Majesty's park of St. James'; and if his Majesty's trees bear such store of acorns, I see not why my poor carving should not imitate them in all humble loyalty."

"Nay, nay, my good lad, I meant no offence. If you have copied his Majesty's oak-trees, well and good; I have nothing to say against it—nothing. The work is very fairly executed—very. It does you marvellous credit, my good lad. If you go on as you have begun, you may become a great carver one day, who can tell? Only take heed to be true to nature—a *leetle* more exactness. Eh, my lad?" And the

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little man smiled patronisingly, and slapped the tall lad on the back. The boy smiled again, a trifle scornfully, perhaps, but with perfect good-humour.

"I thank you, Master Simeon, for your good opinion of me and of my work. And now about the price?"

"About the price?" repeated the dealer, the smile fading from his face, and the sharp, business look coming back to his greedy grey eyes—"about the price? Well, I have hardly considered it as yet. Suppose you come back in a day or two."

"But, sir, I am in immediate want of the money; I must live," was Gibbons' somewhat imprudent response. The little trader's eyes sparkled knowingly; he scented a bargain.

"In that case," he rejoined, "you shall have it at once. Let me see: what do you say to a pound?" The lad's face fell.

"Master Simeon," he said, "I could not sell my work for that. Remember the material, the time, the labour."

"Well, well, well, I don't want to drive a close bargain: I am no hard man; say £1 5s." Gibbons shook his head.

"No? Well, you are not easily satisfied, I must say. £1 10s.?"

"Master Simeon," returned the young carver, firmly, "I have told you that I must live; and as I love not haggling, I will tell you once for all the lowest price I can take; 'tis £2 10s. I can sell my work for nothing less."

"Heard you ever such a thing!" exclaimed the curiosity dealer, turning up his eyes. "£2 10s. say you? Why, you must have a mighty good opinion of your own work! 'Tis by no means perfection, I can tell you. Ungrateful boy! when but for me

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your attempts would have met with no encouragement whatever. You should take my patronage into consideration when you ask such exorbitant prices."

"Sir," replied the young carver, firmly but respectfully, "'tis no exorbitant price that I ask, 'tis but a bare return for my labour. I am well aware that you will receive much more for the bracket from Lord Waterdale."

"I shall lose by it, I shall lose!" whined the old man. "£2 10s. quotha? Nay, come, £2 would overpay you; come, say £2." Again the lad shook his head.

"£2 10s., Master Simeon; otherwise I cannot sell you my work."

"Well then, since you will be content with no less, so it must be," said the dealer. "But I shall lose by it, I shall lose! Reach me the money, child." His daughter handed him the coins; but the great dark eyes had a sad look as she leant forward and whispered:

"Father, it is worth more. You know his lordship offered £5——"

"Hush, child, hush!" returned the old man, hurriedly. "What should such a child as you know about the matter?" The little maiden was silenced, but not the less had Gibbons caught her words. He let them pass unnoticed, however.

"Have you no other commissions for me to execute, Master Simeon?" he asked, pocketing the glittering coins.

"Well," replied the old man, "well, I *have* had an order of the kind to-day; but I know not whether you can carry it out. 'Tis a lady's whim, a mere whim. It seems my Lady Springfield has laid a

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bet with my Lady Betty Grey, that a pot of flowers can be carved in wood so cunningly as scarce to be known from nature. Probably the wager was laid on the spur of the moment, and she repented it afterwards, for my lady comes to me in a great flutter to see if I could get it done for her. I told her I thought it scarce possible, for how were the delicate stalks and leaves to stand upright with no wooden background to support them? I hardly think you will succeed, but you may try if you like. The work, however, must be in my hands by this day month."

"Thank you, Master Simeon; I will do my best, I wish you good day. Farewell, Mistress Leah."

"Good-day, Master Gibbons," answered father and daughter; but as the boy turned away he caught a knowing twinkle in the man's eyes which seemed to say, "Ha, ha, my fine fellow, I have had the best of the bargain after all."

"Greedy old knave," murmured Gibbons, as he walked down the street. "So he is to make £2 10s. extra by my work, and he grudged me the half! Ah, well, I scarcely hoped for so much. I may treat myself to a new set of carving-tools now, I think. This money will keep me in victuals for some time; and if I succeed with this pot of flowers——Ha! what's all this about? A 'prentice rising—a Papist mob? As I live, they are coming this way!"

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CHAPTER IV

A Friend in Need

"*Prec.*—Who is it that calls?"
"*Vict.*—A friend."
"*Prec.*—I thank Thee, Heaven, that Thou hast heard my prayer, and sent me this protector! Now be strong, be strong, my heart."

LONGFELLOW—"The Spanish Student."

"To the river! to the river!" was still the cry of the crowd, as, now grown to a heaving multitude, it swept ever onward, with the poor little foreigner in the midst. He was very quiet now, quite passive in the cruel grasp of the many-handed monster; and, but for the trembling quiver of the heavy eyelids, and an occasional wild, scared glance around, it would have been hard to believe he still lived. Onward bore the crowd, cruel, relentless in its excited rage. Already the glitter of the great river might be seen here and there, at the end of a vista of streets, or through an opening between the tall houses.

"The river! the river!" rose from a thousand voices. 'We will see what cold water will do!" At the sight of this distant sparkle, the poor child trembled violently: he made a last effort for life.

"Messieurs!" he almost shrieked, raising his joined hands in an agony of entreaty; "signori, have pity! what have I done? Let me go! *in pity!*" The piteous black eyes were raised once more, and this time they did not look quite in vain. A hand pressed the arm of the little Savoyard, and a pair of bright, gentle blue eyes looked full into his black ones, with

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an expression of pity and vehement indignation. They belonged to a lad more than a head his superior in height, with a mass of fair curling hair, and a pair of broad shoulders, which succeeded well in keeping a place for their owner among the crowd.

"Friend," he whispered into the ear of the little Italian, "don't be afraid. Keep by me, and do as I do. Courage!" The boy nodded, and looked up with a faint smile; the kind words awoke a little gleam of hope. The crowd was entering a street leading to the river, when suddenly a splendid coach, with four grey horses, and liveried outriders with a coronet upon their sleeves, drove round a corner, directly in their path.

"Place, place for his Grace of Buckingham!" shouted the outriders, striving to clear a way through the densely packed crowd. The people fell back, those in front treading on those behind, in their anxiety to move from the great man's path. The grey horses, suddenly checked in their career, pawed and trampled and foamed at the bit; the coachman swore, the outriders shouted and pushed the people with their long halberds. There was a general panic. For a moment the Italian musician was forgotten. Jammed close to the side of the street, he leant against the wall of a house, and panted for breath. A hand was laid on his shoulder, and the same voice which had before spoken whispered hurriedly:

"Now's your time, now! Don't lose a moment, but follow me." The Italian looked up; his unknown friend was already gliding swiftly towards an archway in the wall. He followed. Still the panic among the people, who hustled from side to side, and fell over each other in the narrow space, like a flock of frightened sheep. The archway was gained without an attempt

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at molestation on the part of the mob. The Savoyard drew a deep breath. The stranger turned to see if he were following.

"Quick, quick, your hand. Now run for your life!" The little musician took the friendly hand, and, putting forth all his slight strength, ran with the speed of despair. Down the lane they flew, turning corners, doubling, winding. The unknown stranger evidently knew every turn of the way. Not till the strength of the little Savoyard was quite spent, and they were far out of reach of his tormentors, did his new friend come to a standstill, and release his hand.

"Well," he said, leaning against the wall, and drawing a long breath, "well, you are safe at last, thanks to his Grace of Buckingham. He's done a good deed for once in a way."

"To you, signor—the thanks are to you," panted the Italian, seizing his preserver's hand, much to his astonishment and consternation, and kissing it vehemently.

"Nonsense!" returned the English boy, hurriedly snatching away his hand. "What's the use of making such a to-do about it? You'd have done the same for me, I dare say (if you could)," he added in his own mind, surveying the slight figure of the foreigner. "But what's your name?"

"Silvio Doria," answered the boy.

"And mine's Grinling Gibbons. There, we'll be friends: what say you? I love music, and I dare say you can play me a tune now and then; you Italian fellows are generally good hands at that."

"Oh, please"—a bright smile flashed from the dark eyes—"I have no friend here, only Filippo and my violin." Here the bright voice broke, and the black eyes filled with tears. "But I forgot, I have

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lost them! O Filippo, Filippo!" The boy covered his face and sobbed.

"Come," said Gibbons, kindly, "don't cry. Where did you lose them? Come, tell me, and perhaps I can help you to find them again." Silvio looked up.

"Oh, thank you, signor! You are good. But those people—oh, they were cruel!"

"Well, but Phil—your friend; where did you lose him?"

"*Filippo*," corrected the Italian, smiling through his tears.

"Filippo. Well, who is this Filippo—a man or a boy? And did the mob set on him too?"

Again an involuntary smile of amusement flashed from the brimming eyes of the Italian boy.

"He is neither, signor. Filippo is my *babbuino*—what call you it? Monk——"

"Oh, ho, your monkey; I see. Well, but tell me how it all happened? How did you manage to offend those good folks there?"

In his broken English, Silvio explained as well as he could how the fray had taken place, though, poor boy, he was far from understanding how he could have provoked it; but Gibbons speedily drew his own conclusions.

"Ha! so that was how it was? I see. My worthy fellow-citizens were indignant at your daring to be of another faith than themselves. They would fly at the ghost of a Papist just now, I verily believe. 'Tis the enemies of the Duke of York, you see, who whisper all these wicked stories of the Papists poisoning the waters, and so forth, to set folks against him. Now, for my part, I don't see why, because a man happens to be a Roman Catholic, he should be a traitor, rogue, spy, poisoner, and I know not what. Not that I'm

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one of them," he added, hastily, as the Italian's dark eyes turned upon him in eager questioning. Poor child! he had had too much cause for wonder at hearing such tolerant words from one not of his own communion. "Not that I'm one of them," continued Gibbons; "but I can't bear to see injustice; I love fair play. Come, though, we're wasting time," he said, breaking off suddenly, for he saw by the continued gaze of the other's wondering eyes that he was scarcely understood. "Tell me what street the row began in, and we'll go and see if Phil—out on my memory! I forget his name—well, if your monkey and violin are still to the fore."

"*Grazia, signor,*"* was the soft answer, as again in his broken English the little foreigner gave the desired information.

Gibbons listened patiently to the somewhat vague and confused description, asking a question here and there, and suggesting a distinguishing feature, till, with some difficulty, he succeeded in finding his way into the old street where our story began.

"Ah, here we are!" he exclaimed, on reaching the desired spot. "Now, where were you standing when the fray began?"

"Here, signor, just under this—ah, Filippo!" he cried, breaking off suddenly, with a rapturous exclamation, as the monkey, leaping from an overhanging balcony, alighted suddenly on its master's shoulder. "Ah, Filippo, where hast thou been, *carino mio?*"† he went on, caressing the creature, which nestled into his bosom and rubbed its head softly against his shoulder. "I thought I had lost thee, *carissimo!*"

Gibbons stood by, looking on, for it was pretty to

* Thank you, sir. † My dear little one.

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see the delight of the boy over his new-found favourite.

But all at once he saw the expressive face change to sadness as quickly as it had done to joy scarce five minutes before, as with a cry of pain the Italian threw himself on the ground, and began picking something from among the stones and mud which strewed the rough causeway. Gibbons drew nearer, and recognised in the few splinters of wood and entanglement of string the broken fragments of a violin. With bursts of passionate grief the boy tried in vain to fit the pieces together, or bring out one tone from the shattered chords, his brown fingers trembling, and the blinding tears dropping fast on the broken instrument all the time; then, with a sudden passionate movement, he flung the fragments from him, and, covering his face with his hands, sobbed as though his heart would break. The young carver's eyes filled as he looked on the boy's sorrow.

"Don't cry," he said, gently, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder; "don't cry, it won't mend the fiddle."

He said this like many another who wishes to comfort, but is at a loss what to say. Silvio looked up quickly, half indignantly, a depth of passionate grief flashing from his tear-bright eyes.

"You say that because you not know!" he cried, in a sob-choked voice. "My violin was my all—my food, my joy, my friend! My father gave it me, my dear father who is dead! All are dead—my mother, Giovannetto, little Maria—all, all! And now he dead too—my violin who I loved! And we will die too, Filippo and me, *ohimè!*"* His voice broke in a choking sob.

* Alas.

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Gibbons looked on in despair. He had all an English boy's dislike to seeing any one cry, and, much as he would have liked to comfort the poor little stranger, he was utterly at a loss how to set about it. Suddenly his hand wandered to his pocket, and drew out one of the glittering coins, the hard-earned price of his beautiful work. He looked at it, then at the sobbing Italian. A vision of the new set of carving-tools danced before his mind's eye. The coin dropped again into his pocket; he turned his head away from the painful scene. Opposite were two shops, one belonging to a cutler, the other to a musical-instrument maker, and there before the lad's eyes were the two objects which were filling his thoughts: the most beautiful and complete set of carving-tools, just what he had been wishing for so long, and a violin. There was a struggle in the boy's mind; but those dark, wistful eyes had been fast winning their way into his heart, and just at that moment a voice seemed to whisper to him—a voice that the young artist was not wont to disregard—"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Gibbons' mind was made up. He turned resolutely away from the tempting carving-tools, and once more went up to the little Savoyard.

"Silvio," he said, kindly, "don't fret about the fiddle any more, man. Look here!" He held up the golden piece. "See, this'll buy you another."

Silvio looked up quickly, the blood mounting to his face.

"Signor," he said, nervously, "signor, I cannot—you must not—I cannot take your gold."

"But why not?"

The Italian's dark face flushed yet more.

"Signor, I cannot; you will want it. The signor

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does not"—he hesitated, and looked up timidly—"does not look rich."

The last words were uttered in a very low voice with a deprecating glance of the dark eyes.

"Oh, never mind!" returned Gibbons. "I *want* to buy you one. How am I to get my tunes else? Come along; there's a beauty over the way there."

And, almost against his will, Silvio was dragged across the street, the bargain made in a brisk, business-like fashion, and the most charming of little violins in his hands.

"Come along, let us get to a quiet place, and then you shall play me something," said Gibbons, hastily cutting short the Italian's thanks, for he saw by the shopman's curious glances that the little musician had been recognised; and the two lads accordingly withdrew to a place where they were not likely to be disturbed. "Now then for a tune," cried Gibbons as they came to a standstill. The Italian looked up brightly, a world of the thanks he could not speak in his soft dark eyes, and, tightening the chords, he drew his bow slowly over them, tuned the instrument with a flush of pleasure at every note he drew from it, and then, with kindling face, broke into a grand chorale of some old Italian master.

Gibbons' eyes filled as he listened to the sweet tones of the violin—now plaintive, low, and pleading, now rising into a burst of impassioned praise; and, with the ready fancy of his artistic nature, a vision of some grand old cathedral, with vaulted roof and endless rows of arches and pillars, rose before his mind. He seemed to see the store of beautiful carving clustering around the sanctuary—carving such as he was always striving after, but could never achieve; and as the glorious old church-music rang in his ears the

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prayer which was so often in his heart—that he might be blessed in his work—rose with a new intensity. So absorbed was he that he did not hear the last soft notes die away, and absolutely started to feel his hand seized and covered with kisses.

"Signor," murmured the musician's voice, trembling with suppressed feeling, "signor, I *cannot* thank you, I know not enough your English words; but I have tried to play it, signor. Oh, God bless you! What *can* I do for you, *caro signor?** I can never——"

His voice choked, but the passionate gratitude of his southern nature flashed and quivered in every feature of his dark face. Gibbons was touched; he took the lad's hand and wrung it heartily.

"There, there," he said, "you've thanked me enough; and if you want to pay me back, I'll tell you how you can do it."

Silvio looked up eagerly.

"Ah, signor, how?"

"Teach me to play."

"*Grazia,*† signor, with all my heart; but that is nothing."

"Isn't it, though? I love music, and you can't think how I've wished to learn, but I've never been able to pay a master."

"Ah! And yet the signor did give much money to buy a violin for me, a poor stranger! May the dear Lord reward you, signor! No one has been kind to me since I did leave my country but you!"

The boy's lips quivered, and there were tears of earnestness on the long, black lashes. Gibbons smiled, but his own eyes were suspiciously wet as he answered:

"Well, Silvio, we are going to be friends, you know; mind you don't forget to come and see me. I live——"

* Dear sir. † Thank you.

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(and he described the place). "There, good-bye; I shall look out for my music-master."

"*Addio,** *signor. Grazia, grazia!*"

Gibbons turned away, but the Italian boy stood looking after him long after he had passed from sight. He felt that he had gained a friend.

"Filippo," he murmured, caressing his monkey, "Filippo, we are alone no more. I have both you and him, Filippo mio, thanks be to God and His blessed saints!"

As for Gibbons, as he walked homewards he took out his remaining money and looked at it. "Well," he said to himself, "folk would say I had done a foolish thing; and maybe I have. This money won't last for ever, and I may not succeed with the pot of flowers. But I'm not sorry. That lad's happiness were worth the sacrifice any day."

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* Adieu.

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CHAPTER V

The Ebony Necklace and the French Peddling-Woman

" *Pedlar-witch.*—Look here,
Gentlemen: do not hurry on so fast
And lose the chance of a good pennyworth;
I have a pack full of the choicest wares of every sort."
" Faust."—Shelley's Translation.

With great care and diligence did the young carver set to work on the difficult task which had been assigned to him. Each morning he went out to the flower-markets, bought a fresh flower or two, and then sat down to imitate them as faithfully as possible in wood. It was a work requiring the utmost patience and perseverance, and fortunate it was for our hero that he possessed them both, for over and over again, just as he was completing a delicate spray, a chance slip of the carving instruments, which were scarcely fitted for such a dainty task, would snap the tender stalks and waste the labour of hours. But Gibbons (with that indomitable strength of will which alone can bring success in any undertaking) persevered, and had the pleasure of seeing flower after flower bud slowly and bloom into exquisite perfection under his dexterous fingers. And the work did not lack admiration nor the artist relaxation, for often in an evening, when the light was fading and the carver growing weary with stooping over his work, a light step on the steep stair, a gentle tap at the door, and a half shy, half beaming " *Buona sera,**

* Good-evening.

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signor!" would announce the arrival of the music-master.

Then would come the pleasantest hour in the day to both lads—that spent over the violin. It would be hard to say which enjoyed it most, pupil or teacher. The former, intent and absorbed, with bent head and careful fingers, tenderly touching the chords, brooding with silent delight in his fine intellectual face over the sweet notes which he drew from them with so much care. The latter, equally intent, but eager and excited, standing over his pupil, now guiding his inexpert fingers, now beating time with his foot, as the tones began to flow slowly and uncertainly into a simple tune, every feature of his dark expressive face quivering with anxiety lest his scholar should break down in the midst. And such pains as the lad took! It seemed as though he were using his whole endeavour to profit by this, the only way in his power of showing his gratitude towards the one being who had befriended him in that great wide city so far away from home. Thus those days of labour were far from being irksome to Gibbons, though they were full of anxiety in many ways; for, unfortunately, while the wooden flowers were growing but slowly, the money was melting away all too quickly from the purse of the young carver. The various woods needed for his work were expensive, and yet *must* be had; and from time to time he had been obliged to dip into his little store, in order to buy some peculiar tool absolutely necessary to the unusually minute and delicate nature of the work in hand.

So it came to pass that while the pot of flowers still wanted several days to its completion, our friend found himself obliged to look out for some means of

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earning a penny to provide for his necessities in the meantime. He had not far to seek; the means lay ready to his hand, in the shape of various little pieces of wood, cut from his different works, which in the intervals of labour he had from time to time amused himself in rounding, polishing, and carving into beads such as he had once seen in a Chinese puzzle. Yes, these were just the thing; he would make a necklace of them. Accordingly, in the space of an hour or two, the beads were pierced, stained a fine black to represent ebony, and strung into the prettiest necklace in the world. Gibbons held it up in his hand and looked at it critically. Yes, it was very pretty. The carving delicate as lacework, each bead a perfect study in its way, for he had spent many an idle half-hour, when he had nothing special on hand, in elaborating them according to the freaks of his own exuberant fancy.

"Well, it'll do, I think," said Gibbons to himself; "I must away out and see if I can sell it, otherwise——" he looked around at his empty purse and empty cupboard and sighed; then he glanced at his half-finished work, his beautiful flowers, and sighed again. "Aye, they might have been finished by now, if——" one longing thought strayed to the beautiful set of tools which *might* have been his, but it was only for a minute; the next he chid himself for the momentary selfishness. "Now out on me that I should be still hankering after those tools, when I have gained a friend instead! Silvio is worth them ten times counted any day. I won't give a thought to the things again." He rose, caught up the necklace, and hurried out, as though afraid of again being tempted by the unworthy feeling.

It was a busy time of day in the London streets;

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despite the steadily increasing terrors of the plague, there was enough of beauty and fashion still left in town, whose love of the bustle and gaiety to be found in the capital was greater than their fears of the infection which might be caught by remaining there. These were now for the most part on their way to the park, for their afternoon's amusement of taking the air and laughing and chatting with the Court gallants and ladies in the Birdcage Walk. It was among these that Gibbons hoped to find a purchaser for his necklace, for he did not wish, for various reasons, to go near Master Simeon's shop till the pot of flowers was finished. But whether it were that the young carver, despite his gentleness, possessed too much sensitive pride to allow of his pressing his work on a customer in due persistent fashion, or that the throngs of busy idlers were too intent on their own pleasure-seeking to pay him much attention, certain it is that he met with more rebuffs than encouragement, and that an hour's weary wandering about the streets found the necklace yet unsold. Gibbons was beginning to despair, and to think much more humbly of his work than he had done on starting, when, at the corner of one of the large thoroughfares, he encountered a little knot of people collected round a foreign-looking woman, who in a brisk, rapid mixture of French and English was calling their attention to the contents of an open box, strapped on the back of a strong donkey, and guarded by a couple of stout serving-men.

"Ah, messieurs, see then, I have *des jolis bijoux*,* what you do call jewels; and so *sheep*,† you never did see such, *non, jamais! Regardez donc, mon bon*

* Pretty jewels. † So cheap.

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*milor !** Here are chains and rings, bracelets and trinkets, *quite* the mode in Paris, I do certainly assure you; have I not in this moment arrived from there myself? *Ah, oui !* And does not her gracious Majesty the Queen of England command my presence at the royal palace whenever I do come to this country? *Mais c'est bien vrai,*† I do tell you; *mais oui,* your good Queen does know what is what, as say you other English. *Ah, c'est ca, monsieur,*‡ you do well to buy that ring; 'tis a *charmant gage d'amour.*"§

Their purchases made, the people dispersed, and the travelling merchant and her donkey, moving on, came full upon our hero, who, with the neglected necklace in his hand, was standing listlessly looking at and listening to the successful sale of the Frenchwoman. With the quickness of her nation, the woman's eyes fell instantly on the beautiful piece of carving in the lad's hand. She stopped, and beckoned him towards her Gibbons obeyed.

"Let see," said the woman, extending her hand eagerly; "*Laisse voir, mon bon garçon. Ah, ciel,*‖ that it is beautiful! *si délicat !* What will you do with it, my good friend?"

"Why, I wish to sell it, madam, if I can."

"*Can?*" exclaimed the Frenchwoman; "can? Why, nothing is easier; all the world will be enchanted with such a necklace. Will you sell it to me, *mon brave?*"

"Willingly," answered Gibbons, delighted at the idea of at last disposing of his work, and pleased at the woman's praises of it.

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* No, never! Look, then, my good lord.
† But that is very true.
‡ Ah, that's it, sir. § A charming love-token.
‖ Let me see, my good boy. O heaven!

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"Ah, well, we shall soon make a pretty little arrangement. What is the price?"

"What you are pleased to give me, madam."

"*Eh, bien,* say"—(and she named a price much below the real value of the necklace, but still quite as much as the young artist had ever hoped for).

"Thank you, madam; I will sell it to you for that."

"That is well; we are then agreed? *C'est bien.*" He handed her the trinket, and she was proceeding to count out the money, with a suave, satisfied look on her painted face, when a richly dressed gentleman, curled and perfumed after the most approved Court fashion, came up and stopped to look at the necklace.

"Will you be pleased to buy it, *milor?*" asked the Frenchwoman, holding up the ornament to view. "See then the beautiful carving. Ah, how it would become the fair neck of *mademoiselle* your *fiancée,** or of *madame* your wife, whichever it be!—monsieur will pardon me if I know not. Ebony and ivory you know, noble *milor.*"

"How much do you want for the bauble?" asked the courtier.

"Ah, *milor,* a mere trifle." And she named a price so much above what had been agreed on between her and Gibbons, that the latter stared in astonishment. The woman flashed on him a quick look, as if to say, "Never mind, we'll settle together presently."

"By my troth, that is a high price!" exclaimed the gentleman.

"Not for ebony, gracious *monsieur,*" returned the peddling-woman. "'Tis a costly wood, *monsieur* will be pleased to remember."

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* Betrothed.

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"But are you very sure 'tis of ebony? there are so many imitations."

Gibbons came forward hurriedly, and whispered to the woman, "Madam, I beg your pardon: I thought you understood; I quite forgot to mention that——"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, turning round quickly, with an angry look in her face. "*Chut!* you shall not lose by it." Then aloud, "Pardon, *monsieur*, this boy interrupted me—what I was about to say?—ah, to assure the noble *milor* that the necklace is of the *best* ebony—the very best. *Monsieur* is fortunate in securing it at such a low price. Shall I envelope it in paper for *monsieur*?" But Gibbons broke in hastily, aloud this time.

"Madam, I beg your pardon, but there must be some mistake; the necklace is not——"

"Hold thy tongue, insolent!" cried the woman, turning upon him, her face crimson with rage; "dare you contradict my words! What should *you* know about the matter? dat I should like to know. *Ma foi*,* the boy is too insolent!" Then turning again to her customer—"*Monsieur* will pardon the interruption; he will not heed what this little *scélérat*† does say of lies. *Monsieur* will——"

The gentleman interrupted her without ceremony.

"Let me hear, my good fellow," he said, turning to Gibbons. "What were you going to say?" The lad doffed his cap respectfully.

"Sir, I fear there is some mistake. This necklace is not of ebony; 'tis of common wood, stained black. I should know, noble sir, none better; for I made it myself, and have just sold it to madam here for a price which I would not have taken had it been of more

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* By my faith. † Rascal.

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costly material. I was to blame, mayhap, for not mentioning it, but on my word it was unintentional." The open, honest eyes in the young carver's countenance carried conviction with it.

"Thank you, my lad; spoken out like a true Englishman. I am beholden to you for saving me from the cozening of this French baggage!"

Then turning to the woman, who stood crimson and trembling with suppressed fury;

"There, take your necklace, I'll none on't! Begone, and think yourself lucky you don't stand in the pillory for this, my fine French Madam!" Saying which, the courtier turned on his heel and walked off.

No sooner had his waving plume disappeared round the corner of the street than the disappointed peddler turned on our hero with a perfect torrent of frantic abuse; it began in English, but fortunately for Gibbons' ears soon changed into French, much more fluent than select. "I'll be revenged, I will!" were the last words he heard, when, having only waited till she had calmed down sufficiently to toss him one more coin of the remaining price, he turned away, considerably poorer in purse, but richer in honour, than he might have been had he been content to connive at falsehood.

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CHAPTER VI

DISAPPOINTMENT

"Till, discouraged and desponding,
Sat he now in shadows deep,
And the day's humiliation
Found oblivion in sleep."
LONGFELLOW—"Gaspar Becerra."

"WELL, my good lad, I'm sorry, but it can't be helped; there's no counting on ladies' whims, you see—none whatever; they're as changeable as a gilded weather-cock; first it's blown to one side, and then, before you know where you are, away it wheels to the other. Aye, aye, they're full of freaks and fancies, are the women-kind. But don't blame me, *I* couldn't help it; how was *I* to know that my Lady Springfield would change her mind and repent of her bet?"

Alas for poor Gibbons! these were the words that greeted him, as, full of hope and triumph, he presented himself with his pot of flowers before the old curiosity dealer. Poor lad! the bright sparkle died suddenly out of his eyes, and the colour faded from his face; he turned very pale, and the delicate flowers trembled in his grasp.

"Won't you take them, sir?" he said, pleadingly.

The old man threw up his hands. "*I* take them? Why, Lord save us, what should *I* do with them? Why, lad, they're not saleable; they're of no use, you see I can't have useless lumber filling up my shop; I've far too much of that already. What it is to have a soft heart! 'tis the ruin of business, it is! Bless me, the scores of old pictures, worm-eaten

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cabinets, and goodness knows what besides, that I've bought to accommodate noble families in distressed circumstances! Take them? not I!"

Gibbons was silent for a minute or two. His pride revolted from another appeal to the compassion of the hard old man, but necessity is stronger than pride, and with a strong effort the lad conquered his reluctance and forced the words from his unwilling lips.

"Master Simeon, this is hard upon me. You gave me a commission, and when I have carried it out to the best of my power—nay, you *force* me to speak up for my work—methinks as well as any man could do it, you refuse to take it—to give me my due. Remember, master, I have had to lay out much money; it has cost me dear, both in labour and coin. Nay, sir, in bare justice, I pray you, consider this."

The old man laughed disagreeably.

"Come, come, my good Master Gibbons, this is a *leetle* wide of the mark; you're an artist, and used to inventions and embellishments, so we must excuse you, I suppose; but be pleased to remember that it was yourself who proposed undertaking the piece of carving. *I* was by no means anxious to press it on you. Not at all, not at all; 'twas only given out of kindness and charity—pure charity—and so you must e'en abide by the consequences. 'Twould have been quite another thing had the gimcrack been of any use, such as a bracket to rest a statue on, a stand for a vase of flowers, or such like. But a pot of wooden posies! Bless me, a mere lady's whim, nothing better! Who would ever buy it, think you? No, no, no Simeon Benoni's no fool."

The poor lad stood as though turned to stone; he had got his answer, and he knew it; but the thought of that bare, cold room, fireless and foodless, nay

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worse—for his money was all gone, and he knew not where to turn for more—the terrible fear of starvation rose before him, and broke down the last remains of pride; he stooped to entreaty.

"Sir, sir, will you not give me a trifle for it? I would let you have it cheap. You do not know——"

"No, no," broke in the old man, turning away and pushing open an inner door, "I'll none of it; I tell you Simeon Benoni's no——"

The door closing behind him cut short the last word.

Like one who had received a heavy blow, the lad set down the plot of flowers on the little counter, leaned heavily against it, and covered his face with his hands. Thus he remained for a minute or two, perfectly still and motionless, then a choking sob sounded through the dark little shop. Presently a small hand pushed aside the dingy curtain which hung on the other side of the counter, and a girl's face peeped through. She stood a minute with a look of deep pity in her dark eyes; then, pushing away the curtain still more, she glided softly into the shop, leaned over the counter, and touched the young carver's arm. He started and coloured.

"Master Gibbons," said a soft voice; "Master Gibbons, what ails you?" He tried to answer, but though his lips moved, no sound came. She looked down on the counter, and started on seeing the beautiful piece of carving standing there neglected. "O Master Gibbons," she exclaimed, "those lovely flowers! My father has never——"

Gibbons looked up quickly. "Yes, he has, Mistress Leah. He has refused to take my flowers; because, forsooth, the lady's repented of her bet, I am made to suffer for it." The lad spoke vehemently, roused for

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a moment from his usual gentleness by the sting of the injury he had received. But he repented him, as he saw how the hot blood of mingled shame and pain mounted into the little white face opposite. The poor child looked down and played nervously with the knick-knacks on the counter.

"Master Gibbons, I—I am very sorry. My father—" she stopped, not knowing how to go on without speaking disrespectfully where her respect was due.

"Never mind, Mistress Leah," returned the lad, taking up his pot of flowers, and turning slowly away. "It can't be mended, I fear, so it's of little use talking about it; I'm sorry I said so much."

"O Master Gibbons, stop a moment, *please*." She put her hand into an embroidered pocket which hung at her side, brought out an old faded purse of green silk, opened it with eager, trembling hands, and took therefrom a piece of silver.

"Please take it," she said, pleadingly, holding it out to Gibbons; "'tis but little, but it is all I have of my own."

The young carver took the coin, but there were tears in the brave blue eyes which had shed not one for all the bitter disappointment.

"God bless you, mistress; I did not know where to turn for bread, and I was—so hungry!" Something seemed to stick in the lad's throat between those last words; he turned hastily to hide the sob which in spite of himself *would* come out with them, and walked quickly away, without another glance at the sweet, compassionate face of the little maiden.

He soon slackened his pace, however. During the last few days he had worked incessantly, hardly allowing himself time to eat, and even had he done so, there would have been scarcely wherewith to satisfy a

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healthy appetite; in spite of his strength, this had told on the lad, and now, dispirited by his great disappointment, the weakness consequent on insufficient nourishment began to make itself felt. A sick faintness stole over him. Slower and slower grew the lagging footsteps, and at length, too giddy to go further, he stopped and leant heavily against the wall of a house. But our hero was not used to sickness. After resting a minute or two, he roused himself with an impatient movement, and an exclamation of—"Tush! what's the matter with me now, I wonder? Hunger, I suppose. Well, I must e'en change Mistress Leah's piece and buy a *manchet*."* He turned into a neighbouring baker's shop, but the strange sound of his voice as he asked for the bread, and the trembling of the hand which he stretched out to take it, startled him, and seemed to arouse the curiosity and alarm of the shop-people, to judge by the suspicious looks which they cast at him, and their mysterious whispered words. Of these last Gibbons could only catch "Stricken,"—"Very like," and—"Careful," but these, combined with the cautious way the bread was laid on the counter to avoid touching his hand, sent the poor lad away with a vague misgiving at his heart, of what he knew not.

"Pshaw, there's nothing the matter with me; it's only hunger," he muttered again; but the roll raised to his lips and taken away untasted belied his words. He loathed the very smell of the new bread. A few more impatient steps onward, and the poor lad was forced to stop again, for the street seemed reeling and turning before his eyes, and his limbs trembled so that he had much ado to save his precious flowers

* A small white loaf.

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from falling. So he went on, moving forward a little way, and then stopping, hardly knowing what he did, till at length he reached his own door, dragged himself painfully upstairs, and utterly overpowered by a deadly sickness, sank helplessly upon his bed.

Poor lad! how slowly the long hours dragged on, as, with throbbing head and hot, aching eyes, he lay watching the broad summer sunbeams steadily creeping, inch by inch, along the wall of his garret-room, followed as steadily by the black encroaching shadows stealing so noiselessly out of the corners. To the sick whirling brain of the sufferer they seemed like terrible death forms which *would* not show their faces, ruthlessly bent on hunting away the bright hopes of light and life. Gibbons watched their silent march with a fascinated horror as to what those faces might be, till he, the brave, stalwart boy, who had set himself single-handed to carve out his own place in the world and to do battle with every obstacle in his path to fame, actually trembled and shuddered with fear lest a shadow should turn and show him the ghastly face of—death! Yes, he had come to that. Delirium was fast stealing upon him, and everything seemed awful and unreal; even his cherished flowers, which, spite of his sickness, he had not neglected to place in safety on the window-sill, now ranked themselves among his tormentors—for the tremulous movement of the quivering leaves and blossoms, shaken on their delicate stalks by every wagon which passed along the adjoining streets, danced chequerwise on the sunlit wall, and seemed to the lad's fevered fancy so many skeleton hands beckoning him away. Gibbons turned away shuddering and buried his burning head in the pillow; but here even he was not free from the horrid fever-imagery. Old scenes of long ago

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rose before his closed eyes; he seemed to hear his dead mother's voice, and then started up wildly to find himself all alone in the darkening room.

Poor lad! he felt himself so utterly lonely in the world, so hopelessly friendless in his sickness and sorrow. Even Silvio had not been near him for days, and in his present state the boy believed only too easily that he also had forsaken him. And the fever grew and grew, till all knowledge of outward things was lost in the single feeling of a burning thirst, and from his parched lips rose a piteous cry, uttered wildly again and again—"Water, water! for the love of God!"

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CHAPTER VII

From Behind the Partition

" Oh, what a thin partition
Doth shut out from the curious world the knowledge
Of evil deeds that have been done in darkness ! "
LONGFELLOW—" The Spanish Student."

THAT too died away, a heavy sleep hushed the words on the boy's lips, and he lay as one dead, alone and forsaken in his utmost need. And still in the silence the leaves shook and beckoned, unseen in their delicate beauty.

No, not unseen. A covetous eye which had marked the growth of each stem and tendril was upon them still. A slight sound broke the stillness of the sick-room. A chink opened in the wooden partition which divided Gibbons' garret from the adjoining house, and the tips of four rough fingers appeared in the opening. A panel slid back very gently, very cautiously, and a man's figure stood in its place, like a picture in its frame, so still and motionless. Yet even in the twilight you might have seen how the eyes moved—the fierce, hollow eyes—greedily devouring the beauty of the pot of flowers, yet glancing fearfully at the insensible form of their young creator. (Surely we have seen those eyes before. Where ?)

Greed mastered fear. The man stole forward, gliding like a cat towards the window. His hand is upon the pot of flowers. Sweet, graceful blossoms, which have grown and flourished in the dark London room, never more will you bloom there, never more cheer those two struggling hearts with your wondrous

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beauty. The man glides away; the panel slides once more into its place. All is as it was before in the silent room. But the pot of flowers is gone from its place, and the boy who has loved them so sleeps on, all unconscious of his loss.

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CHAPTER VIII

A Nice Little Plot

"*Bass.*—May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?
Shy.—Oh, no, no, no, no!
Bass.—Shylock, do you hear?
Shy.—I am debating."
SHAKESPEARE—"Merchant of Venice."

And what became of the flowers? Who was the secret enemy of our unsuspecting friend? To find this out, we must follow the example of this Peeping Tom: put our eye to the chink, and take a glance at the room on the other side of the partition, during the evening of the day before Gibbons took his pot of flowers to the old curiosity dealer. It was a room very similar to that of the young carver, and, from its appearance, one might imagine that its occupant followed a like calling, for there were tools on a bench near the window, shavings littered about the floor, and several carved articles scattered here and there. But the most ignorant eye would have seen at a glance how inferior the work was to that of Grinling Gibbons.

On a heap of shavings in the darkest corner of the room lay a child, covered with a rough pilot-coat, and apparently stricken by the fatal pestilence which was ravaging so many London homes. It was sleeping heavily, but the wasted hand which rested on the coverlet was burning with fever, and the short gasping breath sounded painfully through the still room. A man in a sailor's dress sat by the bed, his tall gaunt frame bending forward, and his bowed head resting on his hands. He sat very still, never moving, save

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when from time to time the child stirred restlessly in its sleep; then he would raise himself with a sharp start of intolerable pain, and gaze wistfully at the boy with a look of anguish in his dark sunken eyes. The sound of a bell was heard in the far distance. The man shivered, for he knew that it was the death-cart setting out on its evening rounds. He started to his feet with a groan, crossed his arms over his chest, and stood looking at his child in despair. Words rose to his trembling lips, bitter words, which he uttered almost unconsciously, as though his trouble could not longer be borne in silence.

"O Hal, my little Hal! They shall not take you, as they took your brother. To think of where he lies now! O God! and I was not there. Evil befall those who have brought me to this! Who is the King, that we should man his ships and fight for him for naught? Aye, aye, he lives in his palace and minds his pleasures, caring nothing that we poor seamen should die of hunger at his very gates! And you —oh, little Hal!—you *shall* not die, you *shall* not! I *must* get money somehow—anyhow—what do I care?"

His eye wandered round the room, and rested on the model of a man-of-war, which lay on the workman's bench near the window. He took it up, and, giving a last look at the sleeping child, hurried downstairs, closing and locking the door behind him. The red cross, which ordinarily marked a plague-stricken house, was not there; for the man, in his utter horror of the awful common grave, which in that dreadful time received both rich and poor alike, had managed to conceal the fact that the pestilence had taken up its abode with him. He walked through the streets quickly, making his way straight towards the house of Master Simeon, the curiosity dealer.

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The little court was dark and deserted. Overhead swung a flaring oil lamp, suspended by a rope stretched high up between two of the tall old houses, on whose dim window-panes the smoky light glanced and flickered under the breath of the night wind, revealing nothing but passing glimpses of dusty gloom. Nothing happy seemed to live in that dreary old court; no light from cheery firesides shone out into the sad twilight, to help the poor old lamp in its vain endeavours after illumination, by a warm glow from within. No, all was gloom and decay in that narrow court. If light there were in the old houses, it was not visible.

Apparently the sailor knew his way well, for, in spite of the darkness, he walked forward with a confident step, and knocked loudly at Master Simeon's door. There was no answer. The man waited impatiently, tapping the ground with his foot. Again he knocked. Another minute or two went by; then there came sounds from within A shuffling step crossed the floor, and the old Jew's cracked voice called out:

"Who's there? I can't let anyone in at this hour, not on any account."

"It's me, Master Simeon," answered the sailor. "My business is pressing; I *must* see you."

"Eh, eh, eh, my friend; pressing, indeed? Methinks everybody *always* considers his own business mighty *pressing*. But, be that as it may, you must needs put it off till to-morrow. Haven't you seen the orders of his worship the Lord Mayor, setting forth that all good citizens must close their houses after nine, when the dead-carts are going about? Body o' Moses! I've no mind to risk coming in contact with the plague-stricken, not I!"

A ray of lamplight shone down upon the dark face of the sailor, and revealed the look of fierce despair which

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came into his sunken, hungry eyes. But no one was there to see it. With an effort he choked down the mingled feelings roused by the old Jew's words, and spoke again.

"But, hark'ee, Master Simeon; you're a man of business, I know, and it would never do for such as you to miss making such a bargain as I could help you to."

"Eh, what! a bargain?" returned the curiosity dealer, with a marked change of tone. "Nay, you should ha' told me so at once, friend. Business is business, say what you will; and it's not for a poor man like Simeon Benoni to neglect it. But" (and the old Jew's voice assumed a shade of doubtful caution) "of what nature is the bargain, friend, eh?"

"Nay, nay, Master Simeon, you surely don't want all the neighbours to share in 'it? Not that *I* mind letting you know at once, an' you list; but——"

"Hist, hist, friend! Not a word!" answered the voice, tremulous with anxiety; and there came a sound of the withdrawing of ponderous bolts and bars. "Not a word! We can settle this business best within. Simeon Benoni's not the man to keep his customers in the cold. Walk in, sir!"

The door swung back, and the visitor obeyed his host's invitation with a haste which seemed rather to startle the old Jew, for he withdrew several paces into the shop, raised the lamp which he held, and peered up into the sailor's face with a half-suspicious gleam in his little grey eyes.

"Body o' Moses! and so it's *you*, Master Foster; *you*, back again! By my faith, I thought I'd seen the last of you long ago! Tired o' fighting the Dutch, eh?" There was a surprise in his cracked voice, by no means agreeably expressed, which seemed to irritate the sailor, for he scowled, and cut the Jew short in his inquiries somewhat sharply.

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"Well, Master Simeon, and what if I am? Seems to me that's *my* business!" Then, as if struck by a sudden recollection, his features smoothed themselves, and when he spoke again the sharp old man knew in a moment that his visitor had come with the intention of asking a favour. "Aye, aye, master, I am tired o' fighting; one doesn't make much at that trade nowadays. Between you and me, there's more hard blows than gold pieces to be had for those who sail under his Majesty's flag—between you and me, you know. So I've just taken to the old business, again, Master Simeon; and I've got something here that I'll let you have a bargain. It's a model of his Royal Highness the Duke of York's ship; you might turn a pretty little sum by it, being war-time, you know, Master Simeon."

The curiosity dealer took the toy into his hand, and eyed it doubtfully. He seemed to be making a calculation in his own mind as to whether he *could* by any possibility turn the "pretty little sum" alluded to. Foster looked at him anxiously, as he stood there in his ragged old dressing-gown (which had probably once been yellow, but now was any colour you like, or rather no colour at all), the dim light shining on his sharp, cunning face and bushy eyebrows, under which the little grey eyes peered with such anxious calculation. He saw an unfavourable expression steal over the mean features; the thin lips closed tightly, and the long ragged beard began to wag slowly backwards and forwards like the pendulum of a clock. The man's heart sank; he thought of his child.

"No, no, no, my friend," began the old Jew, having finished his calculations, and come to the conclusion that no "pretty little sum" could possibly be squeezed out of the offered model. "No, no, no; it won't do,

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my friend, it won't do. In the first place (I always speak candidly, you know; Simeon Benoni's not the man to beat about the bush)—in the first place, my good friend, you haven't improved in your carving since you and I had dealings together; and in the second, his Royal Highness the Duke of York's popularity—Heaven forbid that I should breathe a word against the brother of his most gracious Majesty—I only speak what I hear—but in truth 'tis the case—that his Royal Highness the Duke's popularity is not great enough to lend a value to inferior goods. No, no, Master Foster, it won't do. Take an old man's advice, and stick to the service; it will doubtless suit you better than anything in the carving line."

The sailor's dark face blanched.

"So, Master Simeon, you've cast off an old customer, have you? Nay, nay, don't try to cheat me; *I* know your new favourite, I do. Seems to me you don't get your goods so cheap nowadays; eh, old skinflint?"

There was a reckless, defiant tone in Foster's voice that made the curiosity dealer shake in his slippers, which looked made to match his dressing-gown, so grimy and down-at-heel were they.

"Nay, my friend; nay, my good friend," he whined, putting out his hand deprecatingly, and backing towards the interior of the shop.

"Come," interrupted Foster, impatiently, "no more of that, old man. He makes you disgorge the gold now, doesn't he?"

"You may say so," returned Simeon, reflecting that it is safest to agree with an angry man. "His baubles please the gentlefolks; but 'tis not *I* that gain by him! Why, 'tis but the other day that I was forced to give him a commission for a pot of carved flowers, and I shall have to pay him heaven knows

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what for the bauble. Hey, dear! I shall lose by it! I shall lose!" And, worked up by his own eloquence, the little Jew whimpered as though every word he uttered had been strictly true.

A sudden light came into the sailor's eye, a light kindled of hate and cunning.

"Look you here, Master Simeon," he said, dropping the defiant manner, and approaching himself confidentially to the old man, "we are both men of business, and understand each other. We'll make a little bargain together. You take my model (I'll let you have it for next to nothing), and in return I'll get you the pot of flowers cheap—*cheap*, d'ye see? It's as easy as anything. The boy comes to you, and you find an excuse for refusing his goods; he comes home in despair of selling the paltry thing, and is glad enough for me to take it off his hands for a trifle. Eh, master? I won't charge you much for the commission. Eh?"

The Jew had been greedily drinking in these words; his eyes twinkled with delight at the proposal, and, holding out his hand, he exclaimed eagerly, though in a cautious whisper:

"Done, Master Foster; done, my very good friend. I'll take your model, I will—very pretty little toy, after all" (examining it again), "very; the light was so dim, you see, Master Foster, and my eyes are not so good as they were. Here" (he held out a piece of money); "you must pardon me, my good friend. What! are you going? Well, good-night. Heaven keep you from the plague, my friend!" He shut the door after his visitor, chuckling, as he drew the bolts with jealous care. "So, so, Master Gibbons; a nice little plot! He, he, he! We must clip the wings of these young eagles, or they would soon fly too high for us to feather our nests with their plumage, so they would! He, he, he!"

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CHAPTER IX

Violin-Playing in the Birdcage Walk

" Hands of invisible spirits touch the strings of that mysterious instrument."

Longfellow.—" The Spanish Student."

The sweet notes of a violin, long, wailing, and plaintive, rang through the leafy arcades of the Birdcage Walk, St. James's Park, on that hot summer evening which saw our young carver, worsted in the struggle of life, lay himself down faint and sick in the close attic of a London court. The long golden sunbeams which looked in so mockingly at the garret window, here peeped and twinkled through a canopy of broad leaves falling on the path below, in soft chequer-work of light and shade, as though beckoning the youth and beauty of the Court to come and enjoy the warm golden evening in this their favourite haunt.

But the gilded fingers beckoned in vain. The Birdcage Walk, usually alive with silks and velvets, and gay with voices of the fashionable world, was this evening solitary as any woodland glade; the Court had quitted London, scared at length by the terrible phantom which haunted its sunny streets.

So the violin wailed and chanted in vain, speaking to the solitude alone, in tones almost human in their long-drawn, thrilling sweetness. And the little musician who called out those plaintive notes bent lovingly over the instrument, caressing the strings with his bow, as though he cared not for auditors, so only his darling would speak to him. Presently his voice mingled with the notes of the violin, softly, pleadingly,

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as though in answer to what it was telling him; and the sweet dumb melody took words, and revealed the thoughts which were throbbing at its heart in the following Italian canzonet:

"Italia! Italia!
Sweet home across the sea,
Poor wanderer on a distant shore,
My heart is still with thee;
In dreams I feel thy balmy air,
Land that the sunbeams love!
And hear in fancy once again
The cooing turtle-dove.
So far away, so far away,
Beneath a northern sky,
I long for thee, fair Italy,
The livelong day, and sigh—
Italia! Italia!"

The dark eyes filled with tears, a half-sob broke the soft voice, which, though devoid of power, was very winning in its thrilling sweetness, and you could hear the trembling of the hand which drew the bow across the chords, in the long quivering notes of the symphony. Though the little musician did not know it, he had an auditor now. A tall, slender, dark-complexioned man had approached during the first verse of the song, and, attracted by the sounds, had stopped to listen. He stood back under the shade of some flowering shrubs, listening intently, his black eyes fixed on the musician, and a strange, eager, yearning expression on his dark face, as the boy, after a few more long wailing notes, began again:

"Italia! Italia!
O for thy golden strand!
O for thy sky of softest blue,
My own dear native land!
Where in the pearly twilight hour
Sweetly the vesper peals,
And softly o'er the darkling sea,
Ave Maria steals.

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So far away, so far away,
Beneath a northern sky,
I long to see my Italy
Once more before I die—
Italia! Italia!"

The words died away in a long-drawn sigh, but still the violin wailed on, making the evening air quiver with its strange mournful notes. The stranger drew his hand across his eyes, and sighed too, and his broad, knotty forehead contracted with a movement of pain. "*Ohime!*" he murmured, "Italia, Italia! when shall I see thee again?" Then with a quick step he moved forward and laid his large slender hand on Silvio's shoulder.

"Are you Italian?" he said, speaking that language in a quick, decided voice. The boy turned with a start of astonishment, but answered promptly with a proud ring in his voice:

"*Si, signor,** I am Italian."

"Well," continued the stranger, still speaking Italian, though in a short, abrupt manner which hardly suited the melodious softness of the language; "and you love your country?"

"*If* I love it! O *signor*!" and the boy's dark eloquent eyes were raised with a flashing, melting look, which said more than words. A soft light came also into the questioner's eyes, but his voice was still abrupt as he asked:

"Have you been long in London?"

"Some months, *signor*."

"What did you come for?"

"Ah, *signor*, for what should I stay in Italy? My people are buried, all, all; and they said at home that in England one may gain one's life easier than elsewhere, so we came, Filippo and me."

* Yes, sir.

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"And you are making your fortune?" This was said with a ring of bitter satire, which brought the blood to the dark cheeks of the Italian boy.

"But, *signor*, you mock me," he answered, with proud humility. "The good God has kept me from starving till now; what would you have? With what should I make my fortune?"

"With your violin," replied the stranger, "men have made fame dance to a fiddle before now. Here, give me the instrument." He took it from the boy's hand, laid it across his arm, and drew the bow over the strings. They responded with a long cry. The stranger inclined his head to one side, and, with eyes which were evidently fixed on nothing before him, he glided into the air which Silvio had just sung. How he made the violin speak! Silvio listened entranced. Never in his life had he heard such playing; it was as if a human voice, strong, passionate, and yet exquisitely sweet, were singing that song of home; then the tone changed, and a whole band of various instruments seemed to join in the symphony. Was it magic? Silvio clasped his hands in rapturous astonishment. There was a long pause. The bow rested on the violin, and the musician gazed down the leafy perspective of the avenue, with a dreamy, far-away look in his strange eyes. Suddenly they flashed as though inspired, and the bow flew over the strings in a wild, intricate, wonderful pleasure.

Silvio stood spell-bound. Birdcage Walk, trees, flowers, everything real seemed to vanish before him, and he found himself transported to a wild forest glade, moon-lit, storm-darkened. A crowd of witches appeared dancing madly before him, straining, striving with all manner of contortions to keep time to the wonderful measure. Faster flew the bow, louder

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and shriller shrieked the violin, as though a thousand spirits in pain were imprisoned within it. Shake, turn, trill, quaver, followed one another in lightning succession. The knots in the musician's forehead swelled, his eyes glowed, and the veins stood out on his long sinewy hand. Suddenly the bow stopped in the midst of a madly fiery passage, the player started as though awaking from a dream, and though the air still quivered with the vibrations of that strange sonata, it was in the same abrupt, matter-of-fact voice that he said, turning to his auditor:

"Pshaw, boy, I had forgotten myself; I had forgotten that you were here! There, take your fiddle; it's a child's toy, but I've played on a worse. What did you think of the measure, eh?"

"*Signor!*" and the boy clasped his hands and burst into a stream of vehement "*issimos.*" The stranger's eyes sparkled, half with pleasure, half with amusement.

"There, there, there, that'll do. So you liked it, did you? Well, you've a soul for music, boy. I could tell that by the first note you played. But you want power, fire; you must *practise*; the violin won't yield her heart unsought, coy maid that she is! You must practise, *practise*, and you'll do something some day! You've got it in you. Hey, what's this?—a monkey? What d'ye mean by letting the beast jump on my shoulder in that fashion? So, so, my little fellow!" as the monkey rubbed its hairy head against his cheek. "So, so! One would say you knew me—loved me!" The abrupt voice softened, and a tear stood in the fiery eye, as the musician caressed the animal with his long, thin hand.

"*Signor!*" exclaimed Silvio, on seeing where his favourite had perched itself. "*Signor*, pardon! Here, Filippo! for shame!"

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"Nay, nay," answered the stranger, hastily, "the creature has done no wrong. I had such a one once —years ago. I came into London with Beppo on my shoulder, and an old fiddle on my arm, just as you did, and now—well, well, times have changed! But the creature knows that I love its kind. Hey, boy, will you sell him to me? I'll give you a good price; he'll serve to mind me of old times and Italy. Eh?" But the boy's whole face changed; he turned pale, and it was in a voice of quick alarm that he answered:

"No, no, *signor*, I could not; do not ask me. Part with Filippo! oh, never, never! Come, Filippo *mio!*" (The creature sprang to his shoulder, and nestled into his breast.) "O Filippo *mio, carissimo, carissimo!*" * murmured the boy, "I will *never* part with thee, never, never, *amico mio!*"† The musician looked at the pair, and a gleam of tender memory crossed his dark face.

"Well, well, boy," he said presently, "I won't ask you to sell the creature *now*, but should you ever wish to part with him, remember that I will give him a good home, and you a good price, for I'd like to have the little fellow well. Stay—what's your name?"

"Silvio Doria, may it please the *signor*."

"So. Well, Silvio, if you ever change your mind about the beast there, come to my house, No. —, St. James's Street. Meantime, here's a gold piece to pay you for your song. And, mind what I say, *practise*, and you'll be a musician one day; tell the good folks that listen to your tunes 'twas Signor Nicolao told you so. *Addio.*" He turned and walked rapidly away, and as Silvio watched his tall figure growing less and less in the long perspective of the avenue, he thought with a wondering awe:

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* My Filippo, dearest, dearest. † My friend.

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"So 'twas Signor Nicolao, the great musician, the King's violinist! *Santa Maria*, how he played! And so he was a poor boy like me, with an old fiddle on his arm and a monkey on his shoulder! *Ah, cielo*,* to think of it! And he praised me—*me*, a poor boy like me, and he such a great musician, ah! But he wanted to buy thee, Filippo! Ah, no, I will never sell thee, never, *amico mio*, not even to Signor Nicolao." And as though afraid that covetous eyes should again rest on his treasure, the Italian boy walked quickly away, with his violin on his arm and the monkey nestled to his breast.

* Ah, heaven.

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CHAPTER X

The Shadow of the Plague

"Plague did fling
One shadow upon all."
SHELLEY—"The Revolt of Islam."

ARRIVED at his humble lodgings, Silvio left his monkey under the care of the mistress, and sauntered out into the streets again.

The evening shadows were falling, but a warm golden light still rested on the tall old houses and flashed from their many-paned windows, as the Italian strolled along, basking in the glow with all the lazy delight of the southern-born.

"Ah, I wonder how my good Signor Gibbons is getting on!" thought he, as he sauntered on. "He will have thought me long in coming to see him, but I did not like to stop his work, his beautiful work; ah, I wonder whether he has finished it. How he will like to hear about Signor Nicolao! he too loves music—he has a soul for it, as the *signor* said. So, here we are; now for the music-lesson. I hope he will not have forgotten that last tune. What, the door open! strange."

With a half-defined fear at his heart Silvio entered the tall narrow house where the carver lived, and ran hastily upstairs. The door of his lodgings also stood wide open. The boy paused for a moment on the threshold, looking in; and to his eyes, dazzled with evening glow, nothing was visible but the dim shadowy outlines of the scanty furniture. Could Gibbons be

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out? Scarcely; the room did not *feel* empty. Silvio's heart beat. Then he summoned up courage, and said in a low, timid voice:

"Signor!" No answer. "Signor!" repeated the boy in a louder tone. "Signor Gibbons, are you here?"

A low moan sounded from a far corner of the room. A vague terror took possession of the little Italian; he felt half inclined to turn and flee, but love and gratitude alike restrained him. Could his friend be ill? He advanced a step farther into the room, and, his eyes having become accustomed to the dim light, distinguished the outline of a figure lying on a pallet-bed in the corner. With a beating heart he groped to the place where he knew Gibbons kept the little lamp he was accustomed to work by, struck a light, and approached the bed, trembling like a leaf. There lay his friend in the uneasy posture of sickness, his hands clenching the coverlid, and his fine handsome face thrown back upon the pillow, flushed and contorted with suffering. Silvio bent over him, a great fear growing on him as he gazed. Then he set down the lamp, knelt down, and covered his face with his hands. It was only for a moment, but when he rose his face had a calm, steady look, which it had lacked before.

Stooping over the bed, he with some trouble succeeded in undressing his friend, for the poor lad had lain down with his clothes on; and then, lamp in hand, he proceeded carefully to examine the body. Under the right arm was a large hard swelling. Silvio started as his eyes fell upon the fatal tumour, and a low cry broke from his white lips. He set down the lamp, and clasped his trembling hands together.

"O God!" he murmured, "it is it, the plague!

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O my one friend, he will die like all the rest! and I——" his voice broke, and he knelt once more, sobbing out the piteous prayer, which was fast writing itself over every door in London, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" There was a restless movement from the bed, and the parched lips murmured "Water!"

The Italian recovered himself with an effort, dashed away his tears, and after some searching found a small pitcher of water, which he held to the sick lad's lips. He drank greedily, then with a low moan sank again on his pillow in the same heavy stupor.

There was silence. Silvio stood looking at him with the lamp in his hand, large, hot tears dropping from his dark eyes and veiling the light with a tremulous mist. Then starting once more from his trance of sorrow, he crossed himself reverently, and, setting down the lamp, walked to the door and stood looking out. Dark shadows lurked upon the steep, narrow staircase, one solitary square of soft grey light alone marking the open street door. The house was very quiet; one would have said that the dark listening figure at the stair-head and the plague-stricken boy within the room were the only living beings there. Silvio did not know where to turn for help, being ignorant of the landlord's whereabouts. "Yes," he murmured in his musical Italian, "there is no help for it, I *must* leave him. Yes, the nearest doctor's——" he broke off suddenly, as the deep bell of old St. Paul's smote nine bass notes upon the quivering air. "Nine o'clock! So late! Well, I must risk it, though they do say the Lord Mayor will have none walk abroad after this." He turned, looked once more at the unconscious figure of his friend, and groped his way downstairs.

Once in the street, the boy drew a deep breath, and

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the stunned, bewildered feeling which had oppressed him since he entered the house passed from his brain. A soft, pearly twilight filled the air, making the lower parts of the quaint old houses look dim and shadowy, while the irregular line of their steep-pitched roofs stood out in black relief against a clear saffron sky, from which the rose-tints of sunset had but lately faded. The streets were silent as a city of the dead; only here and there a dark figure, released for a short space from the living tomb of some plague-stricken house, glided slowly past, greedily drinking in the outward air, so grateful after a long imprisonment with the dying. From time to time also, some belated burgher hurried nervously along, studiously keeping to the middle of the causeway, and avoiding all contact with the passers-by, evidently divided between fear of the magistrate's anger in being out after hours, and the still greater terror of contagion. Silvio ventured to accost one of these latter, with a timid:

"Gracious signor, will you in your goodness show me to the house of the nearest doctor?" But the "gracious signor," an exceedingly fat and ponderous citizen, started as though he had been shot, stared at the boy, and, drawing away the skirts of his coat, passed by on the other side with as much speed as his heavy body was capable of. Another and another application met with the same reception. Silvio was in despair. He stood for a moment looking out for some one else to appeal to, but the streets were so deserted that it was some time before he could discover a living being. Suddenly a door opened, a brilliant light streamed for a moment into the dim street, accompanied by the sounds of music and revelry, and, with a loud laugh and a boisterous "Good-

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night," a couple of gallants came into the street and walked carelessly along, humming a tune to the clinking accompaniment of their long rapiers. As they passed, Silvio threw himself in their path, clasped his hands, and looked up entreatingly into their faces.

"*Signori*, O good, kind *signori!* of your bounty tell me where lives the nearest doctor."

"Hullo! what does the youngster say? A doctor? Plague take the doctors, or the doctors take the plague, it's all the same to me, eh, comrade?" His companion answered with a forced laugh.

"Hist, Sir John, I've no mind to hear of that lady before she appears to me, not I. Come along; this little beggar may be stricken, who knows?"

"Like enough," answered the other, with reckless mirth.

"Have you made acquaintance with Madame Plague, eh, lad? What's she like? come, tell us." Silvio shuddered.

"O *signori*, do not jest," he entreated; "you do not know, or you would not speak like that. O *signori*, for the love of God show me where lives the nearest doctor!"

But the nervous cavalier put his arm through that of his friend and pulled him hastily away, while the other yielded with an oath and a burst of laughter, and Silvio heard them carolling down the street, in a rich, careless voice:

"Begone, dull care,
I prithee begone from me;
Begone, dull care, you and I can never agree.
My wife shall dance, and I will sing,
And merrily pass the day;
For this is one of the wisest ways
To drive the plague away!"

The boy covered his face with his hands and leaned

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against the wall, with a bursting heart. The reckless unkindness, the untimely mirth of the two gentlemen, jarred upon his highly-strung nerves, and, in his pressing need and utter misery, he could not keep back the great choking sobs which *would* come out in spite of him.

The sounds of a bell fell upon the still air, a lantern flashed in the boy's eyes, and with the dismal cry, "Bring out your dead!" the pest-cart came heavily round the street corner. Silvio started violently, and a cold shudder ran over him, but he collected himself hurriedly, and accosted the driver with his oft-repeated question. *This* time it seemed likely to meet with an answer. These men knew the plague too well to fear it. With them familiarity had bred contempt. The cart stopped, and the driver flashed his lantern into the boy's face.

"What, the nearest doctor? Yes, yes; Dr. Burnett: four doors down the next street. Are you stricken, friend? Better get into the cart at once, and save us the trouble of coming for you. I wouldn't give a farthing for your life if the plague's got hold of you! Ha, ha!"

"No, no!" answered Silvio, hurriedly, and turning away with a sick feeling, he walked quickly round the corner. An oil lamp was burning over the doctor's door. He knocked, and waited with a beating heart. The stars were coming out in the deep blue overhead. Silvio looked up, and fancied he saw a pitying light in their calm, golden eyes; the sight of their quiet changelessness stilled his beating heart. Were they not the same stars which had shone on him in Italy? He gazed into the tranquil depths of blue, and murmured a prayer. The door opened, and a maid-servant appeared.

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"What, you want Dr. Burnett?" she asked. "Well, it's a pity, but my master's just gone out. He's a deal of work to do just now, he has." Silvio's countenance fell.

"Out!" he faltered. "Oh, what *shall* I do? O *signorina*, lives there not another doctor near who could come?"

"Another?" returned the girl; "well, not nearer than —— Street, and that's *miles* away. Besides, it's ten to one he'd be out, too. There are few enough doctors left in London, and they've more patients on their hands than they can do with. Patience me, but I've a nice life of it! Folks are knocking here all hours of the day, and of the night too; it's a wonder the door isn't broke in. And it's Dr. Burnett here, Dr. Burnett there, for ever." Then, seeing the look of hopeless despair which came into the dark eyes opposite to her, she added, kindly, retreating a little as she did so, "Never mind, young man, I'll tell the master as soon as ever he comes in; is it *you* who want him?"

"No," answered the boy sadly. "No, *signorina*, you needn't be frightened; it is my friend, the only friend I have in all the world. *Ohimè!* if it were but me, it would not so much matter, but for him! *Oh, cielo!* He will die before help comes, I know he will! *Ohimè!*" The girl was touched. Accustomed as she had been lately to scenes of sorrow, there was a passion in this southern grief which she had never seen before.

"Don't take on so, my poor boy," she said, gently. "Indeed, I hope your friend will come round; *some* do, you know. And master is so clever; if *anybody* can cure him, it's Dr. Burnett. I'll tell him, as soon as ever he comes home, I will indeed." It was poor

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comfort, but it was all she could give. Alas! those whom the pestilence marked as its own so seldom looked on this bright world again! The maid waited a moment; then, seeing that the boy still stood there as though petrified, she went on:

"The apothecary who supplies master with medicines, lives just a little way further down the street; his shop is open all night, and he might give you something to do your friend good in the meantime till master can come, you know. Don't you think that's the best thing you can do?"

Silvio brightened.

"Thank you, *signorina*," he answered; "God bless you for the thought. And you will be *very* sure to send Dr. Burnett as soon as ever he comes in. Yes?" There was a pleading note in that foreign-sounding "yes" which brought the tears to the girl's eyes.

"To be sure I will," she answered earnestly; "just leave your address, and master will come as soon as ever he can, certain. Number ——, Belle Sauvage Court? Yes, yes, I won't forget. Good-night."

She went in and shut the door after her, leaving Silvio to find his way to the apothecary's. The little shop was soon found. The master sat behind the counter, whiling away the long night hours by studying a large printed sheet which was spread out before him. It was a list of those who had died in the City of London during the past week. Looking up from this enlivening employment, he perceived the dark face and slender figure of the Italian before him.

"Well!" exclaimed the apothecary, pushing back his spectacles and stifling a yawn; "well, boy, and what do you want? The plague again, I suppose?

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One hears of nothing else nowadays.* Here's no less than 700 died of it in London since to-day s'ennight, that is, 30 in our own parish alone; and the bill was—let me see"—he ran his finger down one of the long columns—"only 602 the week before, so that this shows an increase of ——. But, dear! I'm forgetting. What do you want, boy? But it's not much use asking; ye're stricken, and want an antidote, I suppose, eh?"

"No, *signor*," answered Silvio, twisting his brown fingers nervously together; "it is my friend: he has it, the plague. O signor, do give me something to cure him!"

The apothecary yawned.

"Yes, yes, it's always the same story; something to cure him, indeed! Small use; he'll die, of course. And can *you* complain, when it's the fate of many a better man? There's Sir George White, the finest gentleman possible, and *such* a customer; and Lord Sevenoaks, and Lady——"

"O signor, for God's sake give me something, or it will be too late!" A sob almost choked the last words. The apothecary adjusted his spectacles and looked fixedly at the boy; then he rose and went to a drawer.

"Well, well, I'll see what I can do," he said, making up a small parcel; "it never does to lose hope, you know: what should we apothecaries do if folks gave their friends up for lost as soon as they were stricken? No, no, we mustn't say anything to discourage folks buying our physic. Here, give your friend one of

* Pepys tells us that 700 persons died of the plague during the second week in July. After this the contagion spread rapidly, till, according to De Foe, 3,000 deaths are said to have occurred during a single night in September.

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these powders every hour, and keep the bed-clothes well about him. And if he raves, let him take some of this bottle—it's cooling and induces sleep; moreover, bathe him well with vinegar, specially about the temples, and apply this poultice to the tumour. Has he a nurse?"

"I will nurse him, signor."

"*You*, my boy; do you know the danger?"

"Yes, signor." The apothecary lifted his eyebrows.

"Well, well!" he muttered, half sarcastically, "it's not everybody that holds their life so cheap." He looked at the boy again, and softened visibly. "Stay, child," he exclaimed, hastily; "don't go yet. If you *will* put yourself in danger, you mustn't go unprepared. Here, drink this." He held a glass to Silvio's lips, and made him swallow the contents. The strong flavour of camphor almost choked him.

"There!" said the man of physic, triumphantly, as he replaced the empty glass on the counter. "If there's *anything* can shield you against the plague, it's that. It's a prime antidote—prime. It's my own concoction too. I've kept the ingredients secret, and I flatter myself there's not another man in London—physician, quack, or apothecary—who has discovered anything *half* so sovereign. And sovereign it ought to be, for it's worth its weight in gold, nearly." Then, seeing Silvio's look of blank dismay, he added, hastily, "No, no, it's not in the bill, child, so don't look as though you'd drunk a pearl, like that Queen of Egypt Dr. Burnett talks about—what's her name? Well, never mind, pay for your friend's physic, and God go with you, boy.—Yes, madam," continued the garrulous apothecary, turning to another customer who had just entered the shop, "it's very sad, very What! the carbuncles, has she? The *worst* sign,

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my dear madam, the *very* worst! And such a sweet young lady too. But?" (as the woman sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands) "what can one expect, when the people are dying all round, high and low, rich and poor, like flies, madam, like flies in the ointment of the apothecary. Seven hundred since last week, my dear madam, and thirty in our own——"

Silvio did not stay to hear more of this strange mode of imparting comfort, but, taking up his parcel of drugs, hurried away, with the apothecary's careless words ringing in his ears—"Small use; he'll die, of course; and can *you* complain, when it's the fate of many a better man?" A better man! and this was his one friend! Poor lonely little foreigner! that evening had brought the shadow home to him—the dread shadow that was slowly and surely settling upon the doomed city—the shadow of the plague!

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CHAPTER XI

The Red Cross on the Door

"*Gottlieb.*—What wouldst thou? In the Power Divine
His healing lies, not in our own;
It is in the hand of God alone.
Elsie.—I will myself the offering make,
And give my life to purchase his.
Ursula.—Am I dreaming, or awake?
Thou speakest carelessly of death,
And yet thou knowest not what it is."
LONGFELLOW—"Golden Legend."

WHAT a long night it was! How slowly the hours dragged out in that garret room, each told off by the deep, solemn voice from old St. Paul's, which with few thrilling strokes seemed to be saying unutterable things in the quiet darkness.

Silvio, seated by the sick-bed, grew to watch for that deep voice with a nervous dread; listening, with strained ear and beating heart, for what it might have to tell him next. What would it be? He looked at the changed face on the pillow, and trembled. The sick lad had been very restless during the earlier part of the night, but the medicines had at length taken effect, and towards the small hours he had fallen into a heavy slumber. Thus Silvio sat and watched him, listening for the deep notes of the clock, as they slowly increased in number, and longing for the first light of the grey dawn to steal in at the small window. How long it seemed in penetrating to that dark court, hidden away in the recesses of London's great heart; how long in peeping in at the attic window. So long was it that the boy's dark eyes grew weary of watching;

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the long, soft eyelashes gradually closed over them, the brown hand, which had been bathing the sufferer's forehead so industriously, dropped idly on the bed, and the patient watcher fell fast asleep, with his head on the pillow of the plague-stricken.

So weary was Silvio that he never heard a gentle tap at the door, which came about eight o'clock in the morning. It was repeated, but as no answer came from within, the door was opened softly, and a white-haired old man looked in. He started at the sight which met his eyes Were both dead? Had he come too late to save either? Alas! such things were but too common, and it often happened that the terrible disease killed both nurse and patient before the doctor could arrive. But the newcomer soon satisfied himself that this was not the case here. Though the elder lad was too plainly stricken, and severely so, the younger was still in the enjoyment of full health, and was sleeping calmly and peacefully as a little child. But how long would he remain so? The old man trembled as he gazed at the sweet dark face of the Italian, flushed with sleep, and all unconscious of the awful danger he was in, resting in such close proximity to that other head, smitten to the dust by an awful pestilence too strong for man to combat, whose seal was too clearly to be seen in the dark red spot which burned upon either cheek, and the heavy droop of the discoloured eyelids. And yet their very hair mingled—the dark locks of the sound, and the fair curls of the plague-stricken—upon the same pillow!

"Lord, have mercy upon them!" murmured the old man. He must have spoken half-aloud, for the silken eyelashes of the Italian opened; he started up and looked at the newcomer, with the bewildered gaze

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of those who are hovering on the borderland between sleeping and waking.

"*Il signor medico!*"* exclaimed Silvio at length, suddenly recovering his memory. "*Ah, cielo!* and I have slept! He has had no medicine since—since—Ah, signor, have I harmed him? I was so tired!" The doctor came forward and looked at the sleeper.

"I hope not, my child," he answered, in the quiet, benevolent voice so well known and loved in many a sick-room; "I hope not; he cannot have anything better than sleep. Let me see the medicine you have been giving him." Silvio displayed the draught and powders. A smile passed over the doctor's face.

"Ah, I see—good Master Guildford's favourite prescription! Hum—aniseed, dandelion, camphor, *very* little of the latter though. Hum, hum, where did you get it, child? At old Guildford's, I'll warrant me."

"At the apothecary's near the signor's house," answered Silvio; then, with a sudden fear, on perceiving a curious expression cross the doctor's face—"Ah, signor! it is not wrong—it has not harmed him?"

"I thought as much!" exclaimed Dr. Burnett, with a little chuckle of amusement; "I could swear to little Guildford's concoctions anywhere. Aniseed, dandelion, and for the plague, ha, ha! Harmed him, child? No, no, no! Poor old Guildford's mild prescriptions wouldn't harm a fly (or do it much good either, for that matter)" he added, *sotto voce.* "Well, I think we must prescribe something a *leetle* stronger; it doesn't quite do to fight a giant like the plague with such very slender weapons, eh, my boy? But come, tell me all about it. When did your—what is he? not a brother, eh?"

* The doctor.

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"No, signor, he is my friend."

"Only a friend!—Well, business first. When did your friend fall ill?" Silvio told as much as he knew, the doctor listening attentively all the time. When he had finished, the old man went up to the bed and carefully examined the unconscious lad; then, taking out a case of instruments, he selected a lancet, and, after a close inspection of the hard, inflamed swelling, which had alarmed Silvio so much the night before, he raised the lad's powerless right arm and probed it with a firm though gentle hand. The sufferer moaned. Silvio sprang forward involuntarily, and laid his hand on the doctor's arm, with a sharp—

"Ah, signor, do not hurt him!" Dr. Burnett looked up quickly

"You must not do that," he said, almost sternly. "Keep back; if you shake me, I may do him a mischief." Again he probed the tumour, and again the touch of the steel called forth a shuddering moan from the patient, and a low-breathed "Ah—!" from his nurse. Dr. Burnett shook his head.

"It is as I feared," he muttered; "'tis not yet ripe; but it *must* break, the sooner the better. Well, we will try poulticing for a day or two," he added aloud, turning to Silvio, "and if *that* does not bring it to a head we must e'en apply caustic. But I don't like it, I don't like it; it's a cruel alternative. Eh, dear! I could almost wish I were like some of the doctors who can see their patients suffer unconcerned! It's hard to bear the sight of such pain. Here, child, these are the medicines he must have," continued the old man, and, taking some drugs from his portable case, he mixed them, and gave minute directions for their use. When he had finished, Silvio suddenly seized his hand and looked up pleadingly in his face.

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"Ah, signor, tell me, will he live?" The moisture rose to the doctor's eyes, as he met the passionate look which was raised to him.

"If God will, my child," he answered reverently.

"Ah, but signor, tell me, do *you* think so?" There was no answer. The boy's lips trembled, and his voice shook as he went on, imploringly. "Signor, *per amor di Dio*,* speak,—ah, give me a little hope! You don't know what he is to me—I have no other."

Dr. Burnett cleared his throat.

"My child," he answered, kindly, "I would willingly give you hope, but what can I say? It is the plague, and the wisest of us are almost powerless against that. But this much I will tell you: I see no cause for despair, at present. I cannot tell what may be, but all depends on the breaking of the tumour; if we can manage that in time, we may hope for the best—everything depends upon it, and upon careful, unwearied nursing. Think, my child, can you undertake it? Had I not better try to get a professional nurse?"

"No, signor, no, I will nurse him; I could not leave him to a stranger."

"Well," answered the doctor, doubtfully, "I don't like these hired women, and they are hard to get—very hard; but you are young and inexperienced—are you sure——"

Silvio caught at the word "inexperienced."

"No, signor, I am not that. Signor" (he lowered his voice to a low, awed tone), "I have nursed all my people when the fever was in our village—father, mother, Giovannetto, and little Maria—but God took them all, and only left me behind. Ah, signor! I was so lonely before I knew him," and in an eager way the boy told the history of his meeting with Gibbons.

* For the love of God.

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"I like that!" exclaimed the old doctor, when Silvio came to the end of his story; "it was nobly done. I don't wonder you love him. But," he added, gravely, "I must warn you, child, what you are about to undertake. It is no light matter to nurse the plague-stricken. There will be constant watching, and terrible pain to witness; you must expect to hear the poor fellow say all sorts of wild things in his raving, and he may try to leave his bed; but *that* you must not allow. Summon the watchman to help you if there be need. Of course you know that the house will be shut up? You will not be able to leave it for at least a month, except perhaps a chance time during the night, if I can get leave for you. I have given the necessary notice, and the red cross is already on the door. Think now, can you bear all this?"

"*Si, signor*," answered Silvio, firmly.

"And," continued Dr. Burnett, still in the same grave tone, "I should not be doing my duty if I did not warn you of the danger you run. Do you know that in all probability it will be your death? Few can wait thus constantly on the plague-stricken and escape contagion. Do you know this, my child?"

Again the quiet, firm, "Yes, signor."

Dr. Burnett looked earnestly at the young face before him, and sighed.

"Well, it matters little now, the mischief is likely done already!" he muttered, adding aloud, "My boy, we are all in God's hands, and He can keep us, if such be His good pleasure; but you must not neglect precautions. Keep your head and face constantly bathed with vinegar, and take as much camphor as you can; and don't starve yourself. Have you money?"

"Yes, signor."

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"And plenty of food in the house?"

"No, signor, I have looked and can find none."

"Well, I will have some sent to you, and the watchman will get you anything you want."

The doctor put up his medicines and instruments, and was going away, when, as if seized by a sudden impulse, he came back, and, laying his hand on Silvio's head said, solemnly:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." The boy looked up with a bright, dewy expression in his dark eyes, and the old doctor went away.

Then began a terrible time for the poor little violinist. The red cross, a foot in length, with the words, "Lord have mercy on us," above it, was marked upon the door, and as the other inmates of the house had fled on the first alarm of sickness within its walls, our poor little friend was left alone in this great solitary, living tomb, alone with the plague-stricken, sealed from the outer world, shunned by all his kind. Dr. Burnett had promised to come as often as he could, but this, owing to the great and ever-increasing stress of work, must necessarily be but seldom, and the only other living being within call, the watchman, was a taciturn, surly fellow, who grumbled terribly at every errand he had to run, and kept himself as much aloof from Silvio as he possibly could.

It may easily be imagined, therefore, that the Italian's heart often failed him, especially when in his delirium the sick lad would call upon his friend in piteous accents, reproaching him for his fancied neglect, and murmuring, "Silvio!" in tones which brought the tears to the eyes of his faithful nurse. He spoke, too, of many things which Silvio could not understand; babbling, not of "green fields," but of

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wooden flowers and carved foliage, mourning over some bitter disappointment, and reproaching some one from whom he had received a great injury; and every now and then, with a softening in the tone, came the mention of "Mistress Leah," and a "silver piece." Silvio could not make it out. He knew that the pot of flowers, on which his friend had lately been employed, was a commission from the old Jew dealer; but what was wrong? Could he have refused to fulfil his bargain and returned the flowers? Silvio could not believe this, for, search as he would, the carving was nowhere to be found. No, it was all dark to him, and the only conclusion at which he could arrive was, that Gibbons' wild talk was but the groundless wanderings of a clouded imagination. Thus things went on till the afternoon of the third day, when, as the invalid had fallen into one of his intervals of stupor, Silvio was able to relax his watch, and betake himself to the little window. Brilliant summer sunshine was basking, hot and yellow, in the narrow court, broken into bands by the strongly marked blots of shadow thrown by the surrounding houses; sparrows were hopping and twittering on the stones below, enjoying themselves almost without interruption from human intruders, for half the neighbouring doors were now sealed with the red cross. All was hot, oppressive, quiet; for, spite the gay sunbeams, a spell, awful though impalpable, seemed to brood in the very air.

Silvio had opened the narrow casement to cool the stifling atmosphere of the room, and there he sat, his brown face pressed against the opening, gazing with wistful eyes at the tiny strip of blue sky visible above the steep opposite roofs. Who can tell what longings filled the heart of the wanderer—longings for his native land, longings for the fresh air and freedom

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from which, by this act of self-sacrifice, he was so utterly debarred. And Silvio had another trouble, which, even in the midst of his anxiety for his friend, haunted him continually; this was the thought of Filippo. What might not happen to the monkey during the weeks which must elapse before his master could see after him? Silvio trembled as he thought of his favourite left at the mercy of the landlady, who had not been too fond of him; might she not kill him, sell him, or turn him adrift, when the days passed and her lodger did not return? Too likely. Silvio in his great anxiety resolved to confide his trouble to Dr. Burnett when he made his next visit; thinking that surely the kind old man would either send and make arrangements for the monkey's safety, or get leave for the boy himself to leave the house for an hour during the night that he might provide for the well-being of his favourite.

A sound from the bed broke in upon Silvio's reverie, and called his eyes from their dreamy contemplation of the bit of blue sky.

"Silvio," said the invalid, faintly. The voice sent a thrill through the Italian's heart, for, weak as it was, his quick ear at once detected the return of reason. He hastened to the bedside, and his heart leaped for joy as he saw the blue eyes once more open, not dull and wandering, but with the *soul* again looking through them. But, notwithstanding this more hopeful look, Gibbons' words were not reassuring. "Silvio," he said, in a voice which trembled with weakness, "so you are here at last; I thought you had quite forgotten me, and I wanted you so much last night. I think I must have been working too hard, for I fell down yesterday afternoon quite suddenly." He paused for breath; then, as the other made no

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answer, he went on, in a slightly peevish tone, "Why didn't you come, Silvio?"

"*Ah, amico mio,*"* returned the Italian, in a bewildered voice, "you don't know, but I have been with you ever since you became ill, three days ago."

"Ill?" repeated Gibbons. "Have I been ill? But I don't understand it; surely it was but yesterday that—ah, this pain! What has happened to my arm?"

Silvio did not answer; he stared at the invalid with a bewildered, frightened look in his dark eyes. Gibbons caught the expression, and it alarmed him.

"What is it, Silvio?" he asked. "What is it? What's the matter with me?" Still no answer; the nurse dared not tell his patient that it was the plague. The sick lad raised himself in the bed, with a wild look in his hollow eyes. "Silvio," he cried, in a terrified voice, "*what* is the matter with me? Speak, tell me. Ah, my arm!" He tore the poultice from the swelling, and fell back, half fainting. "'Tis the plague, the plague!" he exclaimed, in a horrified whisper. "The plague—*the plague!*" and buried his face in the pillow, shuddering.

Silvio sat terror-stricken, gazing at his patient in helpless alarm. What should he do in this new phase of the illness? The unconscious raving was bad enough, but this *conscious* terror was beyond his power to control. Presently the sick lad started up once more, waving his hand violently towards Silvio.

"Go away!" he shrieked. "Go away! go away! Don't you know it is catching? O Silvio! *do* not let me kill you!" But the Italian came nearer, and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"For God's sake," he exclaimed, in a trembling

* Ah, my friend.

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voice, "lie down; you will take cold. Oh, *caro signor*, lie down! See, I do not fear the plague; I have been here ever since you fell ill, and have not taken it. God will take care of me," he added, simply. The words seemed to fall with a calming effect on the sick lad. He fell back once more on his pillow and closed his eyes.

"God bless you, Silvio!" he whispered. "O Silvio, my little Silvio, may He grant I have not harmed you, for you have offered your life for me!"

He lay still on his pillow, exhausted, a few tears of utter weakness trickling from his closed eyelids. Silvio stroked the wasted hand which lay on the coverlid.

"*Amico mio*," he said, softly, "don't mind about it. I hope you will get well soon, and I don't care for anything if I can have you again."

"Silvio," whispered Gibbons, after a short time, "I don't think I shall get well—they say few do who have the plague; and if I die, Silvio, I want you to have the pot of flowers. Did I tell you," he added, with a sudden energy, "that old Simeon played me false, and wouldn't take them? the lady changed her mind, or something. Ah, well, it doesn't much matter now; but I should like you to have them; they will be a kind of remembrance, you know, and you might make something of them some day, for there's good work in them. He said this with an artist's loving pride in his handiwork. "And then there are the instruments; they're not worth much, but I was fond of them."

Silvio interrupted him with a sob.

"O signor, *caro signor, amico mio!*" he cried, in a choked voice, "do not talk so. You will not die; you——"

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"Hoity, toity!" exclaimed a cheerful voice at the door; "what's the matter here? Exciting my patient, eh? That's what comes of having boys for nurses. Let me see." And Dr. Burnett went up to Gibbons, felt his pulse, examined the tumour, and fairly chuckled. "Die!" he exclaimed; "not a bit of it! You're the most hopeful patient I've seen to-day, in spite of all the weeping and wailing, and farewell speeches I heard as I came in. Die! Never such a thing, if you only behave like a rational being, and don't excite yourself. Why, that's the most satisfactory tumour I've come across for a long time; the buboes have appeared, and they're breaking as nicely as possible. Come, come, I shall have you off my hands in no time."

It was wonderful what an effect these cheery words had on the two lads. Gibbons looked quietly relieved, and Silvio's eyes shone with joy. He seized the doctor's hand.

"Signor, you have saved him. How can I ever——"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted the old doctor; "no scenes, or I won't answer for the consequences. Sentiment's out of place in a sick room—quite. There now, my patient must have his tumour dressed, take his medicine, and go to sleep; and as for you, my little foreigner, a walk round this deserted house would do you all the good in the world. What if the good folks have fled and barred their doors; there are staircases and passages enough to stretch your legs in. Your friend? Oh, no fear of him; he'll sleep fast enough for some hours to come; I'll settle him. Eh, what—a monkey? Yes, yes, I'll see after that; don't fret yourself. You can't go and leave your patient, you know, even if I could get leave for you, and I doubt

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it, for they're getting stricter than ever. There now, my lad, you're as comfortable as any one who's got the plague can be. Lie down and go to sleep. I expect to see a little colour in your face when I come next. Ah, but that tumour's done my heart good; it's a sight for sore eyes! Well, good-bye, my lads."

The kindly, cheery old doctor waved his hand, and disappeared down the stairs.

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CHAPTER XII

TINTORETTO'S CARTOON

" Deign, O watcher with the sleepless brow,
Pathetic in its yearning—deign reply:
Is there, oh, is there aught that such as thou
Wouldst take from such as I?"
J. INGELOW—" Honours."

IT was with a glad heart that Silvio followed Dr. Burnett's advice, and, leaving his sleeping charge, went for a walk about the open part of the old deserted house. The darkness which had hung over him for so long seemed to be dispersing, and the light breaking in once more.

Silvio thought of this as he sat on the step of the steep staircase, and watched the long, misty rays of sunshine creeping through the chinks of the shuttered windows, and revealing the thick dust which had settled everywhere, undisturbed by any broom; and, as he mused on the new-born hope which was stealing in upon the gloom of sorrow, a grand old chant of thanksgiving awoke in his heart, and he found his lips uttering, almost unconsciously, the noble *Te Deum Laudamus.*

How strange the joyous notes sounded in the deserted house! Silvio almost started as the tones of his own voice, low-pitched as it was, echoed along the passages, and, fearing to awake his friend, he ran up the opposite flight of stairs and entered a long gallery. The doors down each side were all locked, but one at the end stood ajar. Silvio pushed it open and went into the room. It was small, and seemed to

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have been used as a lumber-closet, to judge by the medley of broken things which were piled round the walls. No wonder the landlord left the door open, thought Silvio, for nothing there seemed worth the trouble of stealing. An old frameless picture had been thrust into the narrow window, and the sunbeams were having a struggle with it, forcing themselves in right and left, and peering inquisitively at the gambols of the mice, which scampered away over the dusty floor at Silvio's approach. But the sunbeams were not the only inquisitive creatures there; our friend Silvio was possessed of just as much curiosity, for his first act was to lift down the improvised shutter and take a look out of the window. There was not much to see, for it looked into a narrow back-yard, so narrow that there was only a space of some five feet or so between it and the opposite roof, where a lean, hungry-eyed cat was crouched in the sunshine, doubtless attracted by the scent of the mice within. Lower down, a clothes-line was stretched from wall to wall, with garments hung out to dry, and through a half-open door Silvio caught a glimpse of a woman at a wash-tub, half hidden by a cloud of steam.

Not much of a view, certainly, but to the boy, tired of his confinement in a sick-room, it had its interest. He stood there for some time, gazing over the wilderness of housetops, speculating upon what was going on within, wondering lazily how the laundress could work so hard in the heat, and trying to attract the cat's attention by various softly-uttered syllables in his native tongue. But probably puss did not understand Italian, for she took no notice of the boy beyond a long stare with her hungry yellow eyes. The mice were evidently her only objects of interest just then, and these she was scarcely likely to get at, for Silvio,

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tiring of fruitless allurements, moved from the window, and took up the shutter to replace it. In doing so his elbow brushed the dust from its surface, and revealed a thorn-crowned head, and a face wonderful in its divine intensity of expression. Silvio's attention was caught; he wiped the dust from the picture and held it up to the light. It was a print from Tintoretto's cartoon of the Crucifixion. The boy gazed at it long, perfectly fascinated, not only by its beauty, but by the endeavour to find out where he had seen it before. By degrees a vision rose before him of a church in Venice, rich with tinted light streaming through painted windows, and himself as a little child, holding by his father's hand, and gazing up with wondering awe at the bowed head and pallid face, brought into strong relief by a single ray of sunshine, which fell upon it from some upper window, leaving the other parts of the picture in partial gloom.

"Yes, it was there," murmured Silvio; "and this is the very same—yes, the very same; for I remember that horse's head looking out of the darkness, and the light on the tip of the soldier's spear. I could not see him, he was too much in the shadow; and I remember wondering how the spear could be there with no one to hold it. How strange! Well, go back into your place now, old picture. I must come and see you again another time. Ah! I wonder what Il Tintoretto would say if he knew that a print of his beautiful picture was serving as a window-shutter?"

Silvio returned to his patient, and nothing was said of the discovery till some days after, when Gibbons suddenly asked for his pot of flowers. It was a question that Silvio had been dreading for some time, for he feared the effect of the answer upon his friend in

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his present weakness. But it had to be given all the same; and, as Silvio had imagined, the carver's distress was great when he heard of the loss of his work. At first he was bent upon getting out of bed to ascertain for himself that the flowers were really gone; and when Silvio assured him that he had already searched many times without success, the sick lad wearied himself with conjectures as to who could have been the thief, and threw himself into such a state of agitation, that, to distract his attention, Silvio gave him an account of his voyage of discovery through the old house, and how it had resulted in the finding of Tintoretto's cartoon.

"And now, Signor Gibbons," said the little Italian, in conclusion, "why shouldn't you carve the picture? It would be a grand subject for you, better even than those poor, beautiful flowers. Who knows? it may bring you—what call you it?—*la buona ventura.** Why should you not become as famous as Il Tintoretto?"

Gibbons smiled.

"Brave, Silvio! You are becoming famous for English, at all events. How you have picked it up since I first met you! Well, you have learned that much in my society at least, though Heaven knows I've given you more trouble than anything else. There, it's quite true, so don't deny it. I only hope you don't quite hate the sight of me."

"Ah, signor!"

Gibbons laughed.

"Well, Silvio, don't look at me as though I'd uttered treason. Here, let me see this picture, if it isn't too big for you to carry. We'll borrow it from

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* Good luck.

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my runaway landlord for a while. He won't take us up for stealing, I think."

With some trouble Silvio managed to transport the cumbrous old picture to his friend's bedside, and Gibbons' admiration was even greater than his own.

"Silvio," he exclaimed, after a long and earnest study of the ancient print, "I *will* carve it, if ever I have money enough to buy materials. As for the poor old picture, the landlord will let me have it for the asking, I dare say; at all events he can't want much for such a tattered old thing, and I could put it to a better use than setting it up as a window-shutter. Ah, what sacrilege! What a Goth the old fellow must be! Yes," he continued, sitting up in bed in great excitement, "I can see exactly how it should be. It shall be full-size, and I will carve a frame for it—vine-leaves and corn. Yes, and some flowering brambles and wild roses—the Crown of Thorns in blossom, that is. And, Silvio, I will put in a crossbill at the top. You remember that pretty legend you told me of the little bird that tried to peck out the nails which held the Saviour, and received the sign of the cross on its beak in token? Yes, I see it all! O Silvio, I wish I were strong enough to begin! How stupid it is! even this little bit of excitement has tired me. Well, I suppose I must wait. See, there's a nail in the wall opposite my bed; hang the picture up there, and, since I can do no better, I will at least plan how the carving is to be."

So the old print was suspended opposite the sick lad's bed, and the young carver spent half his waking hours with his eyes fixed on the image of the Crucified, drinking in the awful mystery of the darkest and brightest hour that ever dawned on earth, and dreaming how he would reproduce it in a substance more

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durable than the tattered cardboard of the poor old print; happy in the thought that to him also had been committed a talent, which would enable him to add his stone to the unfinished monument which the great men of all ages, poets, painters, musicians, architects, and carvers, like himself, have been erecting continually to the honour of their God.

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CHAPTER XIII

Out of the Window into Cat-Land

"Tell
First what thou seek'st?—I seek for food."
Shelley—"The Revolt of Islam."

Days passed away, and still Dr. Burnett did not make his appearance. The faint flush of returning health bloomed on the cheek of the sick lad, and slowly faded again; but the old man never came to welcome it. Silvio became very uneasy. His quick eye watched his friend closely, and, though Gibbons never complained, he could not but see that the slowly rising tide of life had come so far, then stopped, faltered, and was gradually creeping back again. Day by day the newly acquired strength ebbed. Day by day his colour waned, and his eye became a shade less bright; it was very little, almost imperceptible, but Silvio saw it all too plainly, and his heart sank, for he felt that if help did not come soon, his friend might, after all, be lost to him.

The cause of this change was not far to seek. The violence of his illness being over, Gibbons might have done without further medical care, could he have had plenty of the nourishment necessary to his prostrate condition; but that nourishment was not forthcoming. So long as Dr. Burnett was in attendance, a basket of food had arrived every day from his house, but since his last visit this had ceased, and poor Silvio's small stock of money had soon failed to supply the deficiency. They had then been obliged to

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fall back upon the fund which the charitable of London had subscribed towards the relief of the destitute; but either through the fault of those who administered it, or the dishonesty of the surly watchman, the food supplied to them was of such a coarse description as to be utterly unsuited to the delicate appetite of the invalid. Even Silvio found it hard work to swallow the hard black bread and little bit of coarse, over-kept meat, which was all they ever received, and he could not wonder that the sick lad should turn from them with positive loathing. But what was to be done? The day watchman met all his complaints with rough words, and the man who supplied his place at night was a friend of the former, and would listen to nothing against him.

As the time went on without bringing the old doctor, Silvio became desperate; he could not bear to look at his friend's patient face, lying back upon the pillow, with the deep blue eyes, which seemed daily to grow larger and more spiritual, fixed upon the old print of the great example of patient suffering, which still hung opposite the bed. Gibbons never spoke of his carving now; the hopeful plans and eager castle-building which the two lads had indulged in, after the finding of the picture, had been dropped as if by mutual consent, and though the carver still liked to have his instruments by his bedside, his thin hand fingered them more and more languidly, and the polishing of knife and chisel, which had been such an interest to him during the first days of his returning strength, became a matter of ever-increasing indifference.

At length, when ten days had passed since the doctor's last visit, Silvio made up his mind that he would wait no longer—he must act for himself; and

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going to the watchman, he asked whether he could get him permission to leave the house for an hour during the next night.

"No," replied the man in his usual surly tone, throwing a glance of suspicion towards the little Italian. "No, no, you must put up with your cage till the time's out; the Lord Mayor has become three times as strict as he was, and there's orders that none shall pass out."

"But will you not ask?" pleaded the boy; "they might let me go."

"What d'ye want to go for?" growled the watchman; "surely you've everything you want—good victuals, such as a beggar like you might be thankful for, besides a roof over your head, and——"

"Oh, but I *must* see Dr. Burnett," broke in Silvio; "he has not been here for more than a week, and——"

"Not likely," growled the man again. "How could he, seeing he's got the plague? Shouldn't wonder if he's dead of it by this time—indeed, I heard as much this morning."

"Dead!" cried Silvio, clasping his hands; "dead, and you never told me!"

"You never asked me," muttered the man.

"Oh, but you knew we were waiting for him, and I did ask you to go to his house many days ago."

"D'ye think I've nothing better to do than to wait on you, you little varmint? I've quite enough work to get your victuals and watch that you don't escape, without running any more messages. There—hands off, I say; I've no mind to catch the plague, I tell you. Get upstairs again, you Papist baggage; we'd never have had the distemper here at all, if it hadn't been for such as you. Get you gone, I say."

Silvio turned away, but he did not go back to his

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friend's room; the thought of that wan white face was too much for him at that moment. Sitting down on the top step of the staircase, he buried his face in his hands in a kind of despair, for he saw no way out of the terrible position in which he was placed. Death and famine seemed to rise up before him like a high blank wall which he could not pass. Was there no way over? Yes, one. The remembrance of the unbarred window, and the roof, scarce five feet distant, flashed upon the boy's mind. It was a forlorn hope. Such an undertaking seemed almost desperate; and besides the difficulty of the attempt, discovery would lead to certain punishment; but it seemed the only chance of saving his friend, and Silvio's loving heart did not shrink from it. Once out of the house, he would go to Dr. Burnett's and find out the truth of the watchman's report, which he only half believed, and, supposing the worst, there was still Signor Nicolao's offer to fall back upon. But when he reached this point in his meditations, Silvio sprung hastily up; he could not face that thought yet. Filippo, the companion of his wanderings, his only link with Italy, could he part with him? "Not yet, not yet," murmured the boy, with a quick motion of the hand, as though he were putting something from him. "I will not think of that yet; one thing at a time, as Padre Antonio used to say. *Ah, cielo!* it cannot come to that!" He turned into the room and, sitting down by the bed, took the sick lad's hand and fondled it after the caressing fashion that Gibbons had grown to love.

"*Amico mio*," he said, softly, "I am going out during a little this night; you will not mind?"

"No," answered the lad, listlessly; then rousing himself, he asked, "Why?"

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"To seek out Dr. Burnett, *caro*;* you are not getting better as you ought. We must get you some better food, *caro*, and then you will be well very quickly; is it not so?"

"Perhaps."

"Ah, *amico mio*, it is sure, I know it is. You only want good food, and that you shall have, if Silvio can bring it you. And you will not mind if I leave you a little; I will come back as soon as ever I can. Yes?"

"O yes," answered the sick lad, wearily; "but I wonder if that old fellow would let you leave! Ah, Silvio, I wish I were going out too! I don't wonder you are tired of this kennel of a place."

"But I am not, *caro*, it is only——"

"Yes, yes, I know," returned Gibbons, with the impatience of illness; "go by all means, since they have let you; but don't stay long."

Silvio said no more; under the circumstances he saw that it was better not to enlighten his friend as to ways and means. He waited till the change of watchmen at ten o'clock; waited till Gibbons had fallen asleep, and then stole softly from the room just as the clock of St. Paul's struck eleven. Fortunately there was a moon. He could see the light streaming in at every chink of the closed windows, as he crept down the stairs. How they creaked! The nervous though resolute heart of the little Savoyard was beating double quick time, long before he reached the door at the end of the long gallery. He turned the handle and went in. The little room was flooded with ghostly-white radiance, which streamed in at the unshuttered window. Just the place to be haunted, thought

* Dear.

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Silvio, with a nervous glance at the black shadows lurking among the piles of old lumber which once had furnished the rooms of the living, but now were cast aside and forgotten. Such thoughts, however, were quite unsuited to the bold attempt on which he had resolved. So, resolutely turning his back on them, Silvio walked up to the window and threw it open.

There lay the wilderness of house-tops, the same, but looking so different to what it had done in open day. Slope and ridge, black and white, sharp light and deep shadow; a city above a city, it lay before him, stretching away far as the eye can reach, desolate, silent, untenanted. Silvio looked, and his heart almost failed him, as he thought how his foot must tread that airy city, those long, narrow ridges, high-roads safe enough for cat or bird, but scarcely for a human being. Then he glanced down into the narrow yard, and shuddered, for all was darkness there. Wash-tub, laundress, clothes-line, all gone, not even the lean cat was to be seen, and Silvio felt that even her presence would have been welcome then.

He measured the distance with his eye. Was it possible? The space had seemed nothing in the bright sunlight, but now all appeared altered and unreal. Should he give up the attempt? No; the thought of Gibbons took away all idea of that. A gutter ran along the opposite roof, and just facing the window was a stack of chimneys. That must be the point for the leap. Silvio mounted to the window-sill, measured the distance once more, and steadied himself, then he shut his eyes a moment and his lips moved. All was still over the great city, but as the boy stood, there came the distant cry—"Bring out your dead!" Silvio started, and a new strength

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seemed to come into every limb. "Not him, not him," he murmured, and, poising his slender figure, he fixed his eye upon the opposite roof and leapt forward. A bound—a struggle—a desperate effort at foothold; then a clinging with hands and arms to a great rough chimney — a wrench upwards, and Silvio found himself trembling and panting among the grimy mouths of the stack of chimneys.

A moment's pause for breath, and he stood up again, and surveyed the position. All was very still; not a quiver in the lights, not a change in the shadows of the great black and white chess-board on which he stood. What must be his next move? He paused to consider. What was that? Surely something stirred near him. Silvio's heart throbbed. A grey shadow crept from the next stack of chimneys, crossed the dark shade which lay at their base, and glided upwards into the silver light. Surely—yes, it was his friend of the hungry yellow eyes. Seldom was friend more welcome. It was something not to be the only living being in that world of shadows.

"Puss, puss!" called Silvio, softly. How strange his voice sounded in the silence! Evidently the cat thought so, for she stopped and honoured him with a long stare, then she went a little higher and sat down on the ridge-stone to consider this intruder into Cat-land at her leisure. Silvio looked at the gleaming yellow eyes and the outline of round back and prick ears, which stood out so sharply against the black-blue sky; and as he looked, a happy thought struck him.

"Ah ha, *Signora Gatta!*" he said, half-aloud, "you shall show me the way down. This is your country, and where could I find a better guide than yourself, eh, signora?" Did puss understand Italian

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this time? It looked like it, for she got up immediately and walked slowly along the ridge-stone, turning her head every now and then as she went, as if to see whether her charge were following.

Silvio lost no time in going after her, creeping on hands and knees; clinging for dear life to ridge-stone and chimney; swinging himself from roof to roof; keeping all the while a sharp look-out for any way of descent which madam puss might not feel disposed to take; but none appeared yet, so he went on following his guide. Well for him that he was a mountaineer, well for him that he had served a good apprenticeship in climbing among the Alps of his native Savoy, or that journey through Cat-land would assuredly have been his last. As it was, he had more than one hair-breadth escape in his search for some means by which he might descend into the street, or find an entrance into one of the houses. He was beginning to despair, when he saw the cat disappear through what proved to be a small narrow window opening in the roof.

"*Grazia, Signora Gatta!*"* said Silvio; "you have been a good guide." Either the house was deserted, or the inmates were asleep. With difficulty he entered by the narrow opening, and was soon in the street.

"Surely He has given His angels charge over me," thought the boy, as he leaned against the wall for a moment's rest. "Now for Dr. Burnett's, and may the blessed saints prosper me still!" And he went on his way with a hopeful heart. Through lane and alley, silent, silent as death. Out into the broader streets, silent also, full of light and shadow sleeping

* Thank you, madam puss.

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side by side—on till he came to Fenchurch Street, where the good doctor lived

But did he yet live? Had death really seized on the kind old man, who had defied him so long in the service of others? Silvio's beating heart asked that question with a sickening fear, as he neared the house. O God! there was the red cross, and the last sad prayer of the plague-stricken, showing out with ghastly distinctness in the moonlight—there, over the old man's door. Silvio stood staring at it in a kind of stunned despair. He had not even courage to ask for tidings from the motionless watchman who stood sentry on the steps.

A bell tinkled, and the sound of wheels came round the street corner. Silvio's heart shrank; he listened for the well-known cry with a feeling of sick expectancy. It came, falling on the night air with a hoarse monotony—"Bring out your dead!" "Bring out your dead!" A window was thrown open and a woman looked out. The moonlight shone full upon her face, and Silvio could see she was the same he had spoken to on the first night of Gibbons' illness.

"Here!" she called out, in a voice choked with grief; "take in my poor master!" The cart stopped below the window, and a corpse, wound in white grave-clothes, was lowered into it.

"Oh, my poor master!" sobbed the girl, "take care of him—bury him decently. He was always a good master to me! Oh, my God, that it should have come to this! What *will* become of us all?"

She shut the window, and the men mounted the cart and drove away with their awful load. Silence fell once more. Then the boy covered his face, with a bitter cry. His first hope was dead—the hope that had stood between him and the parting with Filippo.

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CHAPTER XIV

"GOOD-BYE, FILIPPO"

"I fell in agony on the senseless ground,
And hid mine eyes in dust, and far astray
My mind was gone, when bright, like dawning day,
The spectre of the plague before me flew
And breathed upon my lips, and seemed to say,
'They wait for thee, beloved.' Then I knew
The death-mark on my breast, and became calm anew
It was the calm of love—for I was dying."
SHELLEY—"The Revolt of Islam."

YES, there was no help for it, Filippo must go. But it was a hard struggle, a bitter necessity, which Silvio could not bring himself to realise, though he turned slowly away from the doctor's house and walked towards his old lodgings.

"For his sake, for his sake!" he kept whispering to himself, locking his brown hands together very tightly, as though with a desperate effort to keep firm in his resolve. "For his sake! He gave up his money for me, and I must do all for him. I must, I must! Stay, there is the violin! But no; he gave it to me, and he would miss it. He must never know about Filippo—never, never!"

He reached his old lodgings, half fearing to see the red cross there too. But no; the door was unmarked and unwatched. Silvio knocked once—twice. All was silent. Again. Another pause; and then a window was flung hastily open, and a nightcapped head appeared.

"Heydey! Who's there? what d'ye want?" cried a shrill voice. "We've not got the plague

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here, thank goodness; so what d'ye mean by rousing us up this way, eh?"

"It's me—Silvio," returned the boy. "Don't you remember me, signora?"

"Remember you? I should think I *did*! Couldn't well forget, as long as that nasty beast of a monkey's here to remind me. If it hadn't been for that civil-spoken gentleman, Dr. Burnett, I'd have bundled him out neck and heels long ago, I can tell you. But that's a real gentleman, that is! and pays board liberal. So you've come to take him away? Aye, do so, and welcome; it's glad I'll be to see the last of his impudent face. The mischief of him! Never did I see the like in all my born days. Yes, yes; you shall have him. He's as fat as a seal, the brute. I've been a good hostess to him, I have. Let Dr. Burnett see how I've cared for him; and it might be as well to mention at the same time what an expense he's been to me. Let me see. There was the milk-jug he smashed the first day after you left, and the window he cracked; then there was my new taffeta gown torn—ruined entirely—the nasty beast! And (yes, yes, husband, I'm coming in a minute! Shut the window? Aye, aye, when I've finished speaking; one cannot get a word out, but you men must begin to cackle.) What was I saying? Aye, my new taffeta gown; and the posset-pot, the best china posset-pot." (Again a summons from within the room.) "Heaven send us patience! Coming, man, coming! There, take your monkey, boy, and be off."

Suiting the action to the word, the oppressed landlady tossed the creature into Silvio's arms, and shut the window with a bang which made every pane rattle. Clasping his treasure to his breast, the boy turned away, and walked quickly in the direction of St.

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James's Street. He could not trust himself even to look at his favourite, so soon to be his no longer. But Filippo was by no means disposed to acquiesce in this neglect of his master's. He struggled from the enfolding arms, leapt on to the boy's shoulder, and put a pair of hairy little arms around his neck. Silvio stopped, and a long-repressed sob burst from the depths of his heart. He sat down on a door-step, unclasped the soft little arms, and, bowing his head over the animal, let the hot tears thick and fast fall upon its hairy coat. The monkey made a strange little sound of endearment, and stroked the boy's bowed head caressingly with its tiny paw.

"Filippo," sobbed the lad, "do not do that—do not, O Filippo!" His voice was choked with unconquerable sobs. The monkey nestled closer. "Filippo! Filippo! leave me alone—I cannot bear it. Ah, no, no! And I must sell thee, my heart—my pet! Ah, thou wilt be unhappy too, *carissimo*, thou wilt not like to leave thy master. But I must, Filippo; I must, I must. It is for him, *carino mio*, for his sake. We must not let him die, Filippo; he did all for us. But, oh! to part with thee, *carino mio! carissimo, carissimo!*" The choking sobs burst out again.

Suddenly the boy sprang to his feet, set his teeth tightly together, and, with the monkey in his arms, ran at full speed down the street, scarcely relaxing his hurried pace till he stood before Signor Nicolao's door. He raised his hand to knock, but hesitated, let it drop again by his side, and half turned away; then stopped, his whole face convulsed by the terrible struggle which was going on within him.

"Dear Lord, strengthen me," murmured the trembling lips. "I am very weak. Help me to give up Filippo." Then the hand was raised again, and a

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timid knock sounded on the closed door. The boy waited, his breath coming fast, and his whole form trembling. He might have spared himself. Another knock, another and another, wakened the echoes of the silent street to no purpose. The closed door did not open. Footsteps came down the street, and a watchman, with a red rod in his hand, such as those engaged about the plague-stricken always carried, that the healthy might avoid them, stopped to inquire the cause of the commotion.

"Signor Nicolao lives here, is it not?" said Silvio. "I want to speak to him."

"To speak to him? Well, if you would do that, you must go to Oxford. He followed the Court there, some time since."

"Gone!"

The man passed on; he was in a hurry, and could not stay to notice the effect which his information produced on the Italian boy. For a moment Silvio stood staring after the retreating figure, then his first impulse was almost to smother Filippo with caresses. This over, he sat down, and began to think. Was he glad or sorry that the parting between him and his favourite was for the present impossible? He could scarcely tell. His first feeling was one of intense relief; but now that the immediate danger of losing Filippo was over, the monkey retreated into the background, and he could think of nothing but Gibbons. What was to be done now? Here was another hope of relief gone; and where should he turn for the food without which his friend must die? Silvio thought and thought, till his head ached. That terrible high wall seemed rising before him higher than ever. How should he pass it? Death and famine; oh! they were terrible thoughts—terrible!

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"If the old Jew had but taken the beautiful flowers," thought Silvio, despairingly, "there might have been enough money to last out; there might, but then—ah! that Mistress Leah he talked about when he was ill. She seemed kind, perhaps she would help. Yes, I will go; I can but try."

He jumped up and walked quickly citywards, with Filippo riding on his shoulder. It was a long walk, and the bare brown feet were very weary by the time their owner reached the little court where Master Simeon lived. Ah! they had carried him so far that night. The moonlight had all gone, and the grey morning light was creeping over the city, as Silvio passed under the low archway at the entrance of the court, which he had no difficulty in finding from Gibbons' description. Simeon Benoni's name was over his shop door, so of that also there could be no mistake. He knocked, with a firmer hand this time, and prepared himself for many a repetition, for at that early hour in the morning few of the good folks of London were astir. But to his surprise the bolts were immediately drawn back, the door was opened a few inches, and a girl's face showed itself at the aperture.

"Is it you, Master Foster?" she asked, quickly. "You are expected. My father——" She broke off suddenly on seeing her mistake. "I beg your pardon. Do you wish to see my father?"

"No, signorina," answered the boy. "Pardon, signorina, but you are Mistress Leah, is it not?"

"Yes—but, what——"

"Ah, then it is all right. Signorina, I come to ask your help. You know the Signor Gibbons?"

"O yes."

She opened the door a little wider and moved forward eagerly. Silvio drew back.

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"Signorina, come not too close; take care. I have been nursing him; I might infect you."

The girl turned pale.

"The plague?" she asked, falteringly. Silvio nodded his head. "And he is dead? You have come to tell me. Oh! are you sure?"

"No, signorina, he is not dead. The good Dr. Burnett and I nursed him through the illness. But —O signorina, he is *starving*. The good doctor is dead, and I cannot get him food. O signorina, will you help?" The Italian's eyes filled with tears, he clasped his hands imploringly. Even in that grey light he could see how the colour rose to the girl's face; she flushed painfully.

"Starving?" she repeated in a trembling voice. "And it is *our* fault. My father——" she stopped suddenly in something she had intended to say, substituting, "has not used him well." Again she paused, then looked up eagerly. "Oh, tell me, is there anything I can do?"

The colour came into the Italian's dark face; he looked down nervously.

"Signorina, I have never begged yet, and never would, never for myself, but for him—I cannot see him die of hunger. Ah, signorina, for God's sake, something to buy food!"

Tears came into the little maid's soft dark eyes, and her lips trembled as she answered:

"But I have no money—nothing; and I cannot ask my father, he would—oh! what shall I do? He must not starve, he must not; and yet—stay, there are my clasps; you might sell them, and perhaps he will not miss them, though if—well, never mind, they are my own, and Master Gibbons must not starve." Thus speaking, more to herself than Silvio,

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Mistress Leah detached the curiously-worked gold clasps which fastened her bodice, and laid them in the boy's hand, looking at him earnestly as she did so. Then, with a caution learned from the crooked dealings of her suspicious old father, she added, slowly:

"But—you are *really* Master Gibbons' friend? I may trust you?"

The Italian's whole countenance changed; he drew himself up proudly.

"Signorina, I do not lie; I am a Doria. If you were in Italy—but I forget, how could you know? Signorina, you may trust me."

The girl looked at him again, though no longer suspiciously; a great pity shone in her soft eyes.

"Poor boy!" she whispered; "I have wronged you, though I did not mean it. And you have nursed him all this time? You look thin and pale. Are you hungry?"

The boy's face quivered, but the Italian pride had been aroused, and he would not speak of himself.

"*Grazia*, signorina, I must go now; my friend will expect me." He turned away, then stopped and looked round again. All the pride had vanished from his black eyes, and his whole face was softened. "Ah, signorina, thank you! The good God will bless you for your kindness. *Addio*." He turned once more, and vanished under the low entrance of the court.

The girl clasped her hands, and her whole expression changed.

"Kindness! Ah, if he knew! O father! father!" She went in, and shut the door.

Silvio passed out into the open streets again, with Filippo on his shoulder and the gold clasps in his hand. His object was almost attained; he should

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soon have food now. But there was no joy in the face of the Italian boy. He went on very slowly, with his eyes fixed on the ground, dragging his feet painfully one after the other, as though they were very tired. Presently he stopped, trembled violently, put his hand to his head, and sat down wearily on a doorstep. "Ah, Filippo, I can no more," he murmured faintly, and leaning his head against the door-post, he shut his eyes, and every vestige of colour died from the brown face.

The daylight grew upon the city. Away to the eastward a long primrose line streaked the horizon, brightening to gold slowly but surely. Then a rose-flush tinged the whole eastern sky, blushing ever deeper as the sun drew nearer. The monkey nestled to the boy's breast, and rubbed its head against his cheek. Silvio opened his eyes. "Ah, Filippo, he will think it long; we must go back." He tried to rise, but sank again on his stony pillow with a low cry. A torpor seemed stealing over the poor boy, but the thought of his friend, lying helpless and alone, would not let him rest. "I *must* go!" he cried in his despair. "He will die, and I am not there to help him; come, Filippo." With a painful effort he struggled to his feet, tottered forward a few steps, and fell heavily to the ground. For a moment he lay half senseless, then, rallying all his strength, he crawled back to the doorstep and sat down. A terrible certainty had taken possession of his mind. He shuddered violently, put his hands before his eyes, as if to shut out the light, and fell back again against the door-post. "It is as well," he whispered; "I shall not be there to burden him. I can die here. But, O *amico mio*! I would have saved you, and I cannot—cannot! You will never know it, *caro*, and

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yet I loved you so!" His voice died away in a low sob. Presently his hands fell from his face, and the boy sat motionless, with closed eyes.

Time passed. There was a flicker on the horizon, a kindling spark, and the sun leapt into sight and slowly mounted the morning sky, "rejoicing as a giant to run his course." Through a break in the houses a bright shaft of light shot into the dim street, stole nearer and nearer, and rested on the boy's still, white face. His closed eyelids quivered; he muttered something in Italian. Then the eyes opened a moment, and the brown hand stole languidly to the monkey's head. "Good-bye, Filippo," he whispered. "*Addio*, O my country! I shall never see it again, never, never! O *Italia, Italia!*" The low sad cry died away, the boy's hand wandered to his breast, where the crucifix used to hang, and his white lips murmured the Holy Name; then his eyes closed again, and there was silence. Only the monkey looked at its master's still face with piteous bewilderment, patted him gently with its little hairy paw, as if to attract his attention, and moaned and gibbered when it did not succeed. Poor little Filippo! all your endearments cannot bring him to life again. Far away from sunny Italy, the little Savoyard has laid himself down to die, struck down by the invisible hand which is slaying its tens of thousands around him.

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"Good bye, Filippo."

p. 129.

The Carved Cartoon.

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CHAPTER XV

A City of the Dead

" Under the sun was heard one stifled prayer
For life, in the hot silence of the air;
And strange 'twas, amid that hideous heap to see
Some shrouded in their long and golden hair,
As if not dead, but slumbering quietly,
Like forms which sculptors carve, then love to agony."
SHELLEY—" The Revolt of Islam."

An intensely blue sky—burning, brilliant, beautifully blue—hung over the City of London. Sunshine filled the streets, penetrating everywhere, even into the darkest courts and alleys, and sunshine only; all human life seemed to have vanished. Had the sun and the plague banded together to conquer the city, by slaying man, woman, and child? It appeared so, for every living thing withered before them. And still the sun burned on. Would that dreadful glare, that fierce, silent, awful furnace, never die out? Would the great, broad, mocking sun never cease gloating over the destruction he was working? Miserable wretches, lying in close, airless rooms, and suffering the pangs of a living death; tender women nursing those they loved best on earth, with an agony worse than death gnawing at their hearts, wondered thus—wondered, in a sort of dumb despair, what they had done to deserve all this misery. And the cry of the city—a cry for one cloud, one breath of fresh air—went up to God day and night, morning and evening; and still the sun burned on, and the Death Angel walked to and fro among the people slaying, slaying ever, with no command to stay his hand!

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Creeping slowly along on the shady side of the silent street, every now and then stopping to lean a moment against the wall of a house, was a pale young man, tall and thin, as though but newly risen from a sick-bed; changed, so changed by his terrible struggle with death, that it would have taken a keen observer to make out in the white, sharpened features, and great blue, languid eyes, any resemblance to the strong, handsome lad to whom had once belonged the name of Grinling Gibbons.

But, pitiably weak as he was, our hero had evidently an object in view which would scarcely let him think of weariness. Every time he reached a street corner, the blue eyes would glance anxiously forward as though in search of something; and every passer-by, and they were few indeed, was assailed with an eager inquiry—to no purpose, apparently, for the shadow of disappointment on the white face deepened with each answer. Awful sights met his eyes at every turn. Whole rows of closed houses, marked with the red cross, lined each side of the street, where green blades of grass had forced themselves up between the stones; and here and there an unhappy wretch, suddenly stricken by the pestilence, lay writhing on a doorstep, piteously showing the fatal tokens, and praying for help. But what could Gibbons do? Himself scarcely less helpless, he could but turn away his eyes and hurry on.

Turning down a narrow street, he suddenly found himself by the river. Broad and silent the stream swept by, undisturbed by the usual busy traffic of ships coming and going, loading and unloading. Scarcely more life was to be seen there than in the grass-grown streets. The vessels were for the most part riding at anchor in mid-stream, gently rising

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and falling with every wave of the in-coming tide; and Gibbons could see the tall, dark masts rising like a long belt of fir-trees against the hot blue sky. Now and then the splash of an oar broke on the ear, as a waterman hurried by with a boat full of provisions for those who had taken refuge from the infection on board the anchored ships. Gibbons stood for a moment to watch the elaborate manner in which a basket was lowered over the side of the vessel, filled with food, and raised again: everybody standing at a distance till a light smoke, rising from the deck, showed that the process of fumigation was being performed; he even fancied he could smell the resin and other disinfectants used. It was pleasant there by the river-side; very pleasant after the dull, hot attic in which he had lain so long. The ripple of the water, as it lapped lazily against the stairs, lifting a little wherry which lay chained there, and making it courtesy gently to its reflection below, sounded refreshingly soothing; so much so that Gibbons was tempted to step on board the little craft and rest for a while on the empty seat. There, at last, the dull, hot oppression which had lain so long on his forehead lifted itself a little, and a feeling of comfort stole over the boy as, with one hand plunged into the rippling current, he bared his head to the cool air which rose from the water.

Oh, how refreshing that water felt! Spite of its being the property of dirty old Father Thames, one hand quickly followed the other, and, leaning over the side of the boat, Gibbons splashed the cooling fluid over face, neck, and head, careless of clothing, careless of everything in the world but the exceeding luxury of feeling cool once more. This done, he sat himself down again, and, resting his face on his hands, gazed lazily at the swift flowing river, till a drowsy

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feeling stole gradually over him, and his head drooped on his knees in such a sleep as he had not enjoyed for weeks.

He awoke with a start; something had struck the boat, making her rock from side to side in the water. What was it? Scarcely roused from his slumber, Gibbons looked hastily at the thing which had drifted under the bow of the little vessel, stared at it, shuddered violently, and leapt hurriedly from the boat. His pleasant dream was over. This was no longer a resting-place where he might forget his troubles, for here also he was in the presence of death. Floating on the water, with white, set features, and soulless eyes wide open to the sky, was a dead body—forgotten, abandoned, drifting at the mercy of the tide.

Away again, away from the deceitful river into the heart of the City, once more to set about his weary quest, a quest which the remembrance of that set white face made him renew with a heart more hopeless than ever. The good arrangement of the City authorities made the presence of dead bodies in the street a rare occurrence; but whenever he passed one, Gibbons stopped to gaze at the dead face, fearing with a sickness of heart not to be described that in the quenched features he might recognise those he knew and loved so well. But no; the dead told him no more than the living. Silvio's fate was as yet hidden from him.

Wandering on in this way, he at length found himself by the gate of one of the great City churchyards; and, stopping to look through the bars, he saw that one of the enormous pits used for the burial of the plague-stricken had been dug there. Gibbons' heart beat, and all the blood in his body rushed tingling to his face at the sight of this great yawning gulf.

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So near, so very near; but for the brave, unselfish little soul which had stood between him and death, he also would, in all probability, have been lying there, uncared for, forgotten, among a thousand others. It was an awful thought. No wonder the lad shivered and changed colour as he gazed at the dark outline, just visible through the bars of the gate. But this was not all; something else was in his mind, which held him there with a kind of fascination not to be resisted. He must go in, he must look into that awful grave; he *must*, and yet——

"Folly!" muttered the lad angrily to himself, ashamed of his own weakness. "Why should I not go and look? Why should I be afraid to face death *now?* It is not likely that I shall see anything, but yet——" Again he made an impatient movement, as though to shake off the horrid creeping dread which *would* whisper in his ear, and, lifting his eyes suddenly, he espied the sexton regarding him curiously. Gibbons coloured, vexed that any one should have seen something of what was passing in his mind; but instantly regaining his self-possession, he accosted the man, and asked leave to go into the churchyard. The sexton shook his head.

"Nay, nay, young man," he said; "these are no times to run after death; he comes soon enough to us all without the trouble of seeking him, too soon to suit many, I doubt. Never have I buried such numbers since I came to be sexton here as I have done during the last few weeks. Lord, Lord, these be sad times!"

"Pleasure me for this once, master," said Gibbons, eagerly. "I am looking for——" he could not go on, and hastily changed the sentence; "I have long had a curiosity to see one of these pits, folks talk much

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of them, you know. Stay, is there a fee? I am sorry, I fear I haven't so much as a brass farthing." He felt in his pockets with a troubled air.

"Nay, my lad, it wasn't money I was thinking of. Bless us, no! I'm not one of them sort, 'specially just now. But the infection, the infection, you know. You're young, and don't look strong; you're just the sort it seizes on, and these pits——"

"If that's all, master, there's no fear for me," rejoined Gibbons, hastily; "that needn't stand in the way of my going in. Infection! why, I've been stricken as hard as mortal could and live. Aye, the plague and I have fought it out together!" The sexton stared at him with a sort of admiring curiosity.

"Say you so, young man? Well, then, you've cause to thank God, you have, that's all I can say. There's not many that can boast of having foiled the plague, 'specially just now. Why, folks are dying so, that the carts have been forced to begin going their rounds by day as well as by night. Lord, Lord, to think of it!"

"Well, master, and may I go in now?" asked Gibbons, impatient of the old man's talk. But the sexton did not like being cut short in this fashion; he drew himself up, and stiffened into a mould which he considered becoming to a Church dignitary.

"Young man," he said, "young man, I fear your near acquaintance with death has failed to bring forth meet fruits in your carnal mind. You are too careless in your speech, young man; too prone to lightness of behaviour. You have had a narrow escape, young man, let me tell you, a very narrow escape; but I fear me you are not so thankful as you might be. I did but wish to improve the occasion, young man, as befits a person in my office; but since you do not

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see good to profit thereby, you shall e'en go in and see this sight: maybe 'twill speak to you with a louder voice than mine,* for it's an instructing sight, that might not be without its uses. Depend upon it, it will be a sermon to you, it may be the best you have ever heard in your life. 'Tis a speaking sight, and has a voice with it, and a loud one, to call us all to repentance. Go, if you will."

So saying, the old man swung open the gate, and Gibbons went in, without uttering a word in reply, but with many feelings struggling at his heart. Something in the old man's speech, irritably spoken as it was, had struck him very hard, and raised a sort of painful remorse within him, which the lad's proud reserve could not bear that the awakener should witness.† He therefore took a path to the plague-pit which led him round by the back of the church, instead of following the deeply-rutted track left by the wheels of the dead-carts, which carried their ghastly burdens over grave and hillock straight to the last awful resting-place prepared for the victims of a sickness from which death itself was a merciful deliverer. Once hidden by the wall of the building from the curious eye of the old sexton, Gibbons sat down on an old tombstone, and faced the pain which had risen within him. "Not thankful enough!" was that true? Had other feelings—the irritability of returning health, beaten back again and again by want of food; the depressing lassitude of a weak body and saddened spirits—had these lesser evils veiled the great blessing of a life redeemed from death, a death so few escaped? The lad's heart answered "Yes," for it was an honest

* For the latter part of this speech see the sexton in De Foe.

† De Foe (p. 45) gives some account of this pit in Aldgate Churchyard.

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heart, and would not shut out the truth; but the answer was not given without a feeling of sharp pain. From his childhood he had "thought on these things," and, like one of the old artists, whose whole work was a prayer, his very profession had been linked with his religion. During his illness, when he had looked death in the face with scarcely a hope of escape, holy thoughts had come still nearer to him, and with the remembrance of those long, silent communings before the picture of the Crucified, a feeling of mingled shame and sorrow pressed sorely upon him; that suffering, pleading Face rose vividly before his mind's eye, and seemed to regard him with a grieved reproach; that pierced right Hand had been stretched out to save, and he had forgotten to give thanks. With a swelling heart the lad knelt down among the rank grass and weeds that grew round the foot of the old tombstone, and bowed his face in his hands.

When he rose, the recollection of what he had come to see returned upon him, and with the remembrance came a great dread. He had done wrong, was he not to go unpunished? Choking down the sinking fear, the trembling reluctance which held him back, he walked up to the great pit with a beating heart. The sight which met him there would have made the stoutest spirit quail. Strewn over, but scarcely hidden by a layer of earth and lime, was a hideous mass of dead bodies, hundreds thrown promiscuously together, in an awful common grave—common to rich and poor, high and low, young and old. Here a bare arm protruded from the thin covering, as though stretched up to heaven from the depths of unfathomable misery; there a woman's long hair streamed over a child's naked body, once loved and caressed, now shunned by their nearest and dearest. Some were decently

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wound in grave-clothes, cared for to the last; others were flung in naked, or with no other covering than an old blanket; others, again, had been carried hither in their ordinary clothes, just as they had dropped down in the streets, suddenly conquered by the enemy which had been secretly sapping the springs of life. Noble and beggar, friend and foe, lay side by side, equal in death.

But Gibbons saw none of these; awful and horrible as they were, it was not *they* who had blanched his cheek and sent the blood with such a sudden rush to his heart. *One* object he had seen, *one*, and no more, among the horrors of that ghastly heap, and that was?—only the slight, boyish figure of a Savoyard, lying face downwards, with a dead monkey clasped to his breast.

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CHAPTER XVI

The Root of Bitterness

"To strive—and fail. Yes, I did strive and fail.

* * * * *

Fool that I was! I will rehearse my fault;
I, wingless, thought myself on high to lift
Among the winged—I set these feet that halt
To run against the swift."

Jean Ingelow—"Honours."

Time passed. Time, who buries our dead out of our sight, spread his great winding-sheet over the slain of that awful year, and things began once more to run in their usual course. Winter snow lay white upon the mounds where slept the plague-stricken, spring rains fell gently on their heads; summer sunbeams basked there, heedless of what lay below; and as the months stole on, little blades of green grass began to sprout above the graves of 1665, veiling the horrors of that terrible time, as the fresh growth of new hopes will spring out of the greatest sorrows, hiding the old scars with the kindly mantle which God's great tenderness has provided.

* * * * *

Even our friend Gibbons had recovered from the sorrows of that awful year, and was, as the saying is, "on his feet again," if one may use that expression for the struggles of unknown genius, striving to retain foothold in the rough world, jostled aside by men without a spark of his talent; working away like a mole in the darkness, in the blind, trustful instinct

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that, by patiently burrowing upward, the light would be reached at last.

He had had his hands full during the winter and spring, having been employed in shaping the pillars for a theatre in Dorset Gardens, not very artistic work certainly, but such as it was, Gibbons had been only too glad to get it, as it enabled him to live in comparative comfort, with odd moments—treasured little scraps of time—spent on the work which he had so much at heart, the carved copy of Tintoretto's cartoon. Not that Silvio was forgotten; no, there were times when the sense of loss, the longing for those old days of sweet companionship, was almost more than the lonely carver could bear. No, Silvio was not forgotten—never to be forgotten; but his picture was hung up in the innermost chamber of the lad's heart, not to be looked at too often, lest the sight of those sweet dark eyes, the thought of how the friendship had ended, should take away all heart for work. Let us look into our hero's attic-studio, one afternoon during the summer succeeding the plague-year. Gibbons is working away, busy as usual, at his bench under the window; but he is taking what he considers a holiday this afternoon, and is bending over a long piece of wood, which is to be part of his picture-frame, perfectly engrossed over a spray of blackberries which grows in light, airy festoons under his instrument. How the leaves, starry flowers, and round, bead-like berries stand out from the wood! One might almost imagine that they had just been gathered and thrown there, in all their wild luxuriance; each ragged calyx, each thorny stem, nay, even the little hairs upon the leaves, are all there, exquisitely carved, brought to the utmost perfection by the patient care of a loving hand.

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Gibbons paused and looked at his work with a sigh of pleasure. "Well," he thought, "so much for my brambles: now for the pomegranates; where am I to get a copy for them, I wonder? Ah, I have it! there is one carved upon the stalls in the old cathedral yonder. That'll do; and as I can't get on with my theatre-work this afternoon, I might as well go and take a copy." He got up, pushed back his seat, and with a piece of wood under his arm and his carving instruments in a little bass-basket, left the room, whistling as he went.

Would he have gone so carelessly had he known what was to follow? Scarcely, I think. Hardly had the lad's echoing footsteps died from the creaking old staircase, when another sound broke upon the stillness of the deserted workshop—the sliding of a panel, pushed back in the wall. Again Gibbons' jealous next-door neighbour stole into the room, went up to the carved work which lay on the bench, and examined it with greedy curiosity. He scarcely needed to look thus closely; not a flower, not a berry there, but had grown under his very eye; not a stroke of the carving-tool but had cut to his very heart with the keen edge of jealousy. After inspecting the work for a moment with bent head and scrutinising eye, the man turned, went back into his room, and came out with a long piece of wood in his hands, carved in a similar way; this he placed side by side with Gibbons' work, and compared the two with eager attention. Berry by berry, blossom by blossom, leaf by leaf, the distance between each was almost exact, the size of each all but identical, but no pleasure came into the intent face, no smile unbent the tightly compressed lips. Spite of the geometrical similarity, the inspection was not satisfactory. With a trembling

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hand the man picked up from the ground a long trailing spray of brambles, which the artist had been copying, and placed it between the two wooden imitations. Ah, there was the rub! Exact as the two might be when tried by rule and measure, all trace of likeness died away under the touchstone of nature. The one, a faithful reproduction of its living model—airy, graceful, exquisitely true to nature in all her wild elegance of careless beauty. The other—"Bah!" The man stamped on the floor with angry impatience, and turned in disgust from the sight of his own work. "That a bramble-spray—that!" Alas! it is hard for a man to believe in his own utter failure.

Foster came back once more, and stood at a little distance. Perhaps he had looked too near; such things were meant to be viewed at a distance; it might appear better thus—"so." He rounded his hand and put it to his eye, telescope-wise. No, that would not do either. An impatient sound broke from his lips, and then he let his hand fall slowly, to clasp its fellow behind his back. Thus he stood for long, with eyes fixed upon the pieces of carving, the bitter truth forcing itself slowly upon him. He had failed—utterly! He, a carver from his youth, could not compete with this young lad. All his visions of fame (for, strange as it may seem, this coarse, rough, ignoble-looking man, half seaman, half artist, *had* indulged in such dreams) vanished away. He had failed miserably. The heavy jaw fell; all light died from the keen eyes; for a moment the man covered his face with his hands. He was beaten in the race of life, beaten at his own weapons, and he knew it at last. All were gone now, wife, children, hopes of fame, everything; the man groaned aloud. But,

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starting at the sound of his own voice, he flung his hands from his face, drew up his bent figure, and strode up to the carver's bench, his whole features working with intense passion. Seizing his own work, he flung it on the floor, stamped upon it in impotent rage; then he came back to the bench and clenched his hand. The beauty of Gibbons' carving was more than he could bear. "He must not finish it—he *shall* not—never!" Yet how to stop him? words are so easy, but deeds? Should he serve it as he had done his own work? Useless. By constant watching he had found out enough of his rival's character to know that, like the bird whose nest is destroyed, he would only begin it over again.

Steal it, as he had done the flowers, then? No, such a proceeding would be followed by a like result; and besides, what could he do with the unfinished work? He could not sell it. No, *that* would not do,—not *alone* at all events. "He *must* not finish it," repeated Foster; "I know how it would be, it would be the making of the lad—curse him! It is a masterpiece!" The word seemed to come out in spite of him, but it almost stuck in his throat. Suddenly his face lightened. A gleam of intense malignity shot from his eyes, and he smiled, a bitter, spiteful smile. He had an idea. "No, no, my fine fellow, you shall not finish it," he muttered, "or my name's not Jack Foster." And, shaking his fist as a parting salute to the unlucky picture-frame, he gathered up the fragments of his broken work and left the room, drawing the panel carefully after him.

Meantime Gibbons went unsuspiciously on his way, whistling a little air which he had learnt with Silvio, and swinging his basket of tools carelessly in his hand as he trudged along. Having some business with a

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shopkeeper in Thames Street, he took a longer round than he would otherwise have done, nothing loath, however, for the fresh air and exercise, which this little errand involved, never came amiss to the hard-working young artist, whose time was for the most part spent in his close little studio, where fresh air but seldom found its way.

Passing down a narrow side-alley, he suddenly became aware of a buzz of sound not far off, and, turning into the long riverside street, he came upon a closely packed crowd, heaving and swelling around a single man, raised above their heads, who with vehement gesticulations and moving lips, from which, however, no sound could be heard, seemed vainly entreating a hearing from the shouting mass.

"So the sailors are up again," thought Gibbons, stopping for a moment to observe the noisy companies of blue-jackets, who gave the principal colouring to the crowd. "Seems to me their orator doesn't suit them very well. Poor little fellow, he does not stand much chance of being heard; why, he looks more like a tallow-chandler than anything else; what can *he* have to say to the sailors?" with which careless reflection Gibbons turned away, and entered the shop where his errand lay. The master was talkative, and no sooner was business concluded than he changed his upright position for a more comfortable one, and, with both elbows resting on the counter and supporting his chin, which, having doubled itself long ago, was on the high road to becoming treble, he launched into the stream of gossip, the subject being suggested by his noisy neighbours outside. "Yes, sir, 'tis the sailors again, that have risen. And really, sir—not as I wish to say anything treasonable, but only the plain truth, that nobody can find fault with

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a man for speaking—really sir, they have cause, poor fellows, so they have. It's hard times for the blue-jackets, it is. You see, Master Gibbons, we Englishmen must have something to grumble at, they say; there was the plague last year, and now that's pretty well over—though there was a case only a dozen doors below here, and no longer ago than last week, proving that the contagion is still about, and it behoves every one to be careful; a man's life's valuable, you know, sir, 'specially when he's the father of a family, and of a fine one too, though it's I that says it, as shouldn't. Well, as I was remarking, it was the plague last year, and now it's the Dutch war. Not that we should mind having a brush with the Hollanders, if one saw one's way to the end of it, but one doesn't, there's the rub, sir. Why, it's been going on now nigh on two years, and it seems to me we're no nearer finishing than we were at the very beginning. Poor fellows, poor fellows! I do pity the men that have to go, whether they like it or not, forced away from wife and children, liable or not liable, and with no pay for their pains neither; for you see, Master Gibbons, between you and me" (and the speaker looked cautiously around to see that he was not overheard), "they *do* make away with such a sight of money down at the Court there, that there's none left for the sailors' wages. Poor fellows, they stood it a long time, but what can you expect? Tread on the worm and it turns at last. Such commanders too! Not that I have anything to say against Prince Rupert, Albemarle, poor Sir Christopher Mings that was, and such as they; but *some* of them!—well, I won't mention names—all I can say is, that it's a shame to send our brave men to sea under such good-for-nothing, be-scented and be-curled courtiers, who

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know no more of the salt water than they do of the moon; and all because they have managed by lies and flattery to gain the good word of my Lady Castlemaine, or my Lord of Buckingham. It's a sin and a shame, it is. Well, just half an hour or so before you stepped in, sir, the press-gang had been and carried off two fathers of families, outside in the street there, and so the sailors have risen, for they've been nabbing them right and left for the new fleet, and the men are determined to stand it no longer, and *I* don't blame them, for one. And so you must be going, sir? Well, good day, but take a bit of good advice, and look out for the press-gang; they don't care who they get hold of, so long as he's strong, and has a pair of broad shoulders like yours, sir."

When Gibbons came out into the street again, he found that the crowd was still there, quieter now, however, for they had found an orator more to their mind, in the person of a big, burly brewer, who mounted on a barrel, which he had been trundling along when the press-gang appeared, was favouring the multitude with a blustering harangue, scarcely in character with his jolly, good-natured expression of countenance.

Having lost some time already in listening to the sentiments of his friend the shopkeeper, Gibbons did not feel inclined to devote much more to those of the brewer, so, after indulging his curiosity for a few minutes, he turned away with the somewhat selfish reflection, "Well, after all it's no concern of mine, so long as I don't fall in with this same press-gang myself. What is more to the point is, that the afternoon's getting on, and I have not yet made my copy of the pomegranates. So, hie, for St. Paul's!" Thus thinking, our artist turned up a narrow side-street,

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and was soon far away from the noisy throng, in the quiet shadow of the old cathedral.

But though Gibbons turned away thus carelessly from the scene of commotion, we who follow his fortunes cannot at present follow his steps. So, with your leave, good comrades, 'mid those scenes of long ago, we will remain behind among the blue-jackets, and listen awhile to what the burly brewer has got to say.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE BREWING OF THE STORM

" Slowly the silence of the multitudes
Past, as when far is heard in some lone dell
The gathering of a wind among the woods—

* * * * *

The light of such a joy as makes the stare
Of hungry snakes like living emeralds glow,
Shone in a hundred human eyes—
' Where, where is he ? ' "

SHELLEY—" The Revolt of Islam."

" COMRADES, we are Englishmen, and England's sons are not wont to take a wrong tamely; why should they? Have they not hands to strike as well as any other men, aye, and better? Show me a man that can strike like an Englishman? You can't? No, nor I either; and yet here we are, content to be dragged away from our wives and children against either law or right, liable or not liable, it's all one, and without a penny of press-money either. And what for? To serve in the King's ships, forsooth, and against the Hollanders too, the lubberly Hollanders, whom we've licked many a time; and why don't we lick them now, as we used to? Why isn't the war over? Aye, can any tell me that? There's something wrong here, mates, and none of you'll take the trouble to find it out. No! you'd rather go tamely off with the press-men. Very well, go then; *I'm* not the man to stop you!" and the big orator raised his eyebrows, passed his hands one over the other as though to wash them of any further concern

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with the interests of his poor-spirited fellow-townsmen, and then looked down with a half twinkle in his eye to see how his speech was taken. The contemptuous tone in which it concluded evidently nettled his auditors more than a little. The crowd surged about excitedly, and a hoarse roar of dissent rose from a thousand mouths.

"No, no."

"Who are you talking to, Bill Brewster?"

"What do you take us for, then?"

"Down with the press-gang!"

"We'll not submit!"

"Who says we can't lick the Dutch? Who says it, I say?" cried a boy's shrill voice, and the cry was taken up by a dozen others. The brewer jumped down from his rostrum with a laugh.

"There, there, somebody must take my place. What do *I* know about fighting the Dutch? The King's men won't find it such an easy matter to catch Bill Brewster; they've tried it before now, and may try it again, but by ——" (he swore a great oath and shook his brawny fist), "he's got native weapons to defend himself with, and knows how to use them too. *I* know nothing about fighting the Dutch, and don't mean to either; King's men are enough for me."

"Who says we can't lick the Hollanders?" cried the boy again.

"Who says so? why, no one," answered a deep voice from the crowd.

"We'd lick them fast enough, and not once but always, if——"

"Aye, aye, let's hear him; *he* can tell us, maybe, why things don't go as they should!" And without more ado the last speaker was lifted into the elevated position just vacated by the brewer.

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This new orator, who had thus become the centre of public attraction, was also a big, powerful man, a man who looked as though he could dismiss the press-gang in a fashion quite as summary as his predecessor the brewer; but his seaman's dress and storm-browned countenance showed that, whether with or against his will, he had seen service. His tall gaunt frame and marked features were not such as could escape recognition, and accordingly no sooner was he hoisted above the heads of the crowd than several voices hailed him as an acquaintance.

"Halloa, Foster!"

"Jack Foster, as I live! Come, old mate, let's hear what you've got to say about this evil."

Nothing loath to find he had the ear of the multitude, the sailor began speaking in a strong, deep voice, easily heard by all around. "Yes, mates, I ought to know something about the matter, for I've fought the Hollanders many a time, both under old Monk and Prince Rupert, and though they're tougher customers than some of you seem to think, 'specially if old De Ruyter's to the fore, yet they're no more than Englishmen can manage well enough, if there's fair play. Give us that, and we'll do."

"Aye, aye, fair play!" shouted the crowd. "We've a right to that, we have."

"Just so, comrades, we have a right to it, but do we get it? If so, why are the Hollanders able to keep their heads above water, as they do, after all the lickings we've given them? Look here, my lads; you heard of the fight the other day between Ostend and Dunkirk? Of course you did; why, all London was shouting victory one day; and the next—why, messengers arrived from the fleet, and then you heard something not quite so cheerful, but still we were

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not beaten, O no! If the citizens of London would only come forward and press the enemy back a little, matters would soon go faster. That's what my Lord Brouncker told you, when he came on shore, didn't he? Well, look here, *this* is how things were; we were chased home by the Hollanders, and that's the plain truth; call it a victory if you like!"

A roar from the multitude, a roar in which rage, disappointment, and wounded vanity were curiously mingled.

"Yes, mates, chased home, that's about it; and after our victories, after taking their grand Bordeaux fleet; after the glorious fight in which we settled their wonderful Van Tromp, whom they thought such a great gun, and so he was too; after Solebay*—to be chased home! And how was it? How was it that the Duke and Prince were not together when the fight began? How is it that the Dutch always know when they may attack us at a disadvantage? I'll tell you what it is, comrades, there's——"

He was interrupted by a rough, deep curse from a man's voice; then a woman's cry rose shrill above the stillness of the crowd. Foster turned his head. On the outskirts of the throng a man was struggling in the grasp of two sturdy King's officers, backed up by a strong band of their fellows, who stood closely round, with naked weapons gleaming in the sun. The poor fellow was struggling desperately, hitting heavy blows at his captors, writhing, twisting, rather hindered than helped by a pale, slight woman, with a white quivering face (his wife, poor thing, as the agonised cries to spare her husband plainly revealed to all around),

* Fought September, 1665. A still greater battle was fought at the same place some years later, when neither party succeeded in gaining the victory.

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who clung to his right arm, and would not leave go, spite of the efforts of one of the press-gang.

Taken by surprise, the crowd stood for a moment stock-still; then a loud, angry hum, swelling into a roar of rage, rose from the tightly-packed mass. It surged wildly forwards, men and women treading upon each other in their efforts to reach the front.

"Down with the press-gang!"

"Have at them, lads!"

"Hold on, comrade, we're coming!"

"Down with the press-gang!"

Again a wild heave forwards. Women fainted and fell; men became entangled in knots that they could not burst. It was a scene of wild commotion.

Several strong men at length succeeded in forcing their way outwards through the fringe of women and children, who had been unable to give any assistance; but they were too late. The cunning officers, well up in the art of kidnapping, had already disappeared with their victim, and were lost in the maze of alleys which threaded the closely-packed wooden houses on either side of the street. Cries of disappointment, oaths and curses, deep and bitter, almost drowned the hysterical sobbing of the poor wife. Foster, from the top of his barrel, looked down unmoved on the heaving mass below him, and the pale faces and wasted frames, many of whom had passed through the furnace of the plague, and had barely escaped with their lives; whose business had suffered in the terrible year, leaving them scarcely wherewithal to keep soul and body together. Masses of sailors were there, disbanded when the fleet had come home last time, and refusing to enlist again of their own free will under a king who kept their wages from them to spend on his own pleasures. How hollow did most

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of those sunburnt faces look; how gaunt and unfed the great strapping forms, that had made such a brave stand against those who disputed with England the sovereignty of the seas! Foster saw it all; saw how the poor fellows were driven well-nigh mad with injustice and wrong, and did not scruple to play on their roused feelings, to turn their sufferings to the satisfaction of his own private revenge. He saw his opportunity and took it.

"Comrades," he said, raising his powerful voice above the din, "will you stand this any longer? Look here" (he bared his left arm, which he wore in a sling, and showed a deep, red, angry scar), "*this* is what I got for fighting the King's battles the other day—this, and nothing more; and not a man of us gets anything else, that I can see. And yet, mark me, comrades, everything might be put a stop to at once—kidnapping, pressing, fighting, wounds, injustice, and all; and how? Just this: the war would be finished to-morrow—would have been finished long ago, if——" There was a deep hush; every face was raised to the speaker; the whole multitude was hanging on his words. Foster paused a moment, enjoying his sense of power; then he went on, every word dropping upon the thousand listening ears, deep, distinct, mysterious.

"*If — there — were — not — a — traitor — in — the — camp.*" He stopped to mark the effect of his communication.

Silence for one moment—aghast, astounded silence. Then the feelings of the multitude burst out in a roar which might have been heard at Whitehall, miles away. Presently words broke the dense mist of sound, rising broken and disconnectedly.

"*Who* is the traitor?"

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"Tell us!"

Foster raised his hand to command silence.

"Let's hear him!" yelled the bystanders.

"Silence, lads, let's hear Jack Foster." The roar sank into a murmur, then died to a listening hush. Every face was raised again, every eye fixed on the seaman, the master of the moment. Foster felt he was so, and his voice had a ring of triumph in it, as he opened his lips to speak.

"Aye, mates, a traitor—a traitor who lives in our midst, and sends information to the Hollanders of every measure as soon as determined upon. I don't speak without reason, mates. I've kept a sharp look-out on the villain, and I could take my oath that all's not above-board there. Why, his very christened name is a Dutch one, and doubtless he's akin to the Mynheers, and would like well to see them with their foot on *our* necks and on England's!"

"No, no."

"Never; we'll die rather!"

"Down with the traitor!"

The excitement of the crowd was getting beyond bounds. Again Foster raised his hand.

"Stop a bit, lads; you haven't heard my yarn out yet. He's got an accomplice, mates—a foreign Papist fellow, who acts as go-between, so that he may keep snug and not excite suspicion. We've had this last chap in our clutches once, lads, d'ye mind? It was just at the beginning of the plague-time, and we were going to duck him for poisoning the waters, when he was spirited away somehow, doubtless by his plotting friend—d'ye mind him, lads? a little dark chap?"

"Aye, aye!"

"Down with the traitor!"

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"Let's drag the spawn of a plotting Papist out of his den."

"Yes, and be clapped into prison for rioting? No, no, lads. Let *me* manage this little matter. We'll lodge information in the proper way. We'll get a warrant in his Majesty's name—send these fellows off to plot with the spiders in a dungeon—put an end to the Dutch war, with its pressing, and what not, and gain credit for being active, loyal subjects to his Majesty. What d'ye say, lads? Will ye trust Jack Foster?"

"Aye, aye!"

"Hurrah for Foster!"

"Long live Jack Foster, the people's friend!"

"Hurrah!"

A gleam of satisfaction lit up the dark face of the man on the barrel. He was tasting the sweets of power; the sweet wine of revenge was all but in his grasp.

"Thanks, mates; I knew you would. Jack Foster's not the man to betray a comrade. But stay, we must have witnesses. Here, Will White, Bob Winter, Dick Rider, *you* know him, you must have seen some of his queer goings-on, and can speak to them; eh, lads? You all know this deep villain, this traitor to his country—this friend of the Mynheers—*Grinling Gibbons the Carver!*"

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CHAPTER XVIII

From the Heights Above

"I built a bridge of fancies,
It reached from earth to heaven."

Song.

A deep, silent calm reigned within the old cathedral, where sat Gibbons at work on his model. A calm, scarcely broken by the distant sounds from the city, which stole softly through the half-open chink of the great doorway, like children coming into church, who hush their voices and tread gently, awed by the sacred gloom brooding under the great arches and tall clustering pillars. Paul's Walk—the great aisle where the courtiers of Charles II. used to promenade when the weather was not fine enough for the park, turning God's house, by ribald jests and profane laughter, into a very den of thieves—was deserted to-day, with the exception of an ancient verger, who passed to and fro, with his eyes on the pavement and his fat hands clasped behind under the folds of his black robe of office.

One or two big cathedral flies, born, bred, and nurtured within the sacred precincts, buzzed drowsily over the figures of saint and apostle, high up in the narrow lancets which pierced the massy walls of the nave; and through one of the lofty windows stole a long slanting ray of sunlight, dyed with the blood of martyrs, and rainbow-hued with gorgeous tints from robe and crown and coronal, piercing through the intervening gloom right down to the altar, and resting there in peace. Motes danced in the sunny ladder,

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transfigured by the golden light, till to an imaginative fancy it might almost seem that the carved angels had descended from their niches overhead, and were winging their way, half invisible, to and fro between heaven and earth, on another Jacob's ladder. The house of God, the gate of heaven! strange contrast to the scene we have just left; the noisy confusion, the restless movement, the bitter, passionate uproar raised by the wrongs of men. Gibbons had quite forgotten the sailors by this time—quite forgotten everything in the absorbing interest of his work. Seated on a hassock within the great open-work screen which divided the chancel from the body of the church, he had been for some time busily engaged in transferring the likeness of a beautiful cluster of pomegranates, with fruit, flowers, and leaves, from the dark oak of the stall into the piece of wood he had brought from his workshop. It was but a rough copy after all, at least so the carver considered it; but Gibbons had a knack of giving life to the most ordinary block of wood by the merest touch of his tool, so that the quickly-executed model bore a faithful likeness to the exquisite old carving, which no mere drawing could have carried away, and, when transferred to the picture-frame, would be elaborated so as to rival the original in grace and finish.

So absorbed was Gibbons in his work that he did not at first observe the entrance of a party of strangers into the cathedral, and it was not till they had advanced some distance up the aisle that scraps of conversation, at first low, then rising into a louder key, attracted his attention and made him pause for a moment to listen. The speakers were not visible, a cluster of pillars and the chancel-screen combining to hide them from view; but from the voices Gibbons

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at once concluded that they belonged to the higher ranks of society.

"Indeed, my lord, but there is a very considerable bulge in the outer wall; and see, it is even perceptible here, inside. How much from the perpendicular, Adams?"

"A quarter of an inch, sir, by the plumb-line, behind this pillar."

"You see, my lord? This is serious," continued the first speaker, who was possessed of a singularly calm, firm tone of voice.

"Yes, yes, my good sir," replied the lord, "but may it not have been done '*ab origine*,'* to heighten the effect, you know—eh, Mr. Chichley?"

"Certainly, my lord," answered another voice, "that is precisely my opinion. It seems to me that the 'main building has been made to recede outwards for an effect in perspective, in regard to the height,' just as your lordship says. The Tower of Pisa, you know——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you," struck in he of the calm voice, "but that is scarcely a case in point. The leaning position of that tower is now considered as due to the sinking of the ground. No architect in his senses would have dreamt of putting up such defective work on *purpose*, and I am sure Mr. Chichley, as an architect, will agree with me there."

Gibbons did not catch the answer, as the party had moved further off. Presently, however, the voices became again audible, and it appeared that a warm discussion was going on.

"Six inches out of the perpendicular! Mr. Chich-

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* The marked sentences are from the account of this consultation in Evelyn's Diary.

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ley, these pillars cannot long continue to bear the great weight of the building in their present leaning condition."

"Nay, sir, my opinion is that the pillars have been built so on *purpose*; the slight incline greatly heightens the effect to *my* eyes. What do you say, Mr. Prat?"

"Certainly, Mr. Chichley, certainly; no doubt at all about it. The cathedral requires very slight repairs. As for the cupola, which Dr. Wren and Mr. Evelyn purpose erecting instead of the steeple, I call the idea simply preposterous. No offence, I hope, gentlemen?"

"None," returned the calm voice, as quietly as ever, and Gibbons saw the party emerge from behind a pillar, and take up their position exactly under the central tower, where he could see them without being himself seen. The group consisted of a bishop, a dean, two or three men in working dress (masons evidently), and four or five gentlemen. A party of architects and Church dignitaries come to inspect the dilapidations of the old cathedral, Gibbons concluded, from the words he had overheard, and rightly too.

The last speaker took his stand a little in advance of the rest, and began pointing upwards with his stick to draw the attention of his companions. He was a little man, short and slightly built, yet with a quiet stateliness about him which bespoke a person of consideration; a splendid brow, bright, quick eyes, and features which would pass nowhere unnoticed, not because of beauty, but from the unmistakable stamp of genius.

"See, gentlemen, this is what I propose doing—with your concurrence, of course," he began, and Gibbons at once recognised the voice which had before attracted his attention. "It is of no use patching;

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we must restore. This roof is far too heavy; it has already thrust the pillars so far out of the perpendicular as to be positively unsafe; *that* must be removed. Then this tower, ugly and defective originally, is crumbling fast; the foundation is faulty, and must be entirely renewed. Why should we retain any of the structure, being, as it is, a disgrace to the rest of the building? Pull it down, gentlemen, pull it down, and I will construct a cupola such as they have at St. Peter's in Rome, which will match well with the Corinthian portico, built by Inigo Jones in the reign of his late Majesty. This 'will be an absolute piece of itself, will make by far the most splendid appearance of any tower I can devise;* may be of present use for the auditory, make all the external repairs perfect, and become an ornament to his Majesty's most excellent reign, to the Church of England, and to this great city, which it is a pity, in the opinion of our neighbours, should longer continue the most unadorned of her bigness in the world.' See, gentlemen, here are the plans which I have prepared."

A flush of enthusiasm was upon the speaker's cheek, his eyes sparkled, and it was with an air of almost triumphant confidence that he handed his carefully-prepared drawing to his companions. The bishop took it with a dubious air, spread it out by the carved figure of an armed crusader, on an altar-tomb near at hand, and pointed out the different parts to his coadjutors. Gibbons caught few of their words; but the shakings of their reverend heads, the "hems" and "haws" which came from their reverend mouths, and, above all, the shade that crept over the architect's bright countenance, revealed their import plainly

* Wren's own words: *vide* "Cunningham's Life."

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enough, and our hero was not surprised to see the parchment rolled up and returned to its owner, nor to hear the discouraging remarks of the bishop as he and his companions passed near him on their way to a side door.

"Well, well, Dr. Wren, your plan is very fine, very fine indeed, but it will scarcely suit our present purpose. However, we will think about it. There is plenty of time, plenty. The old cathedral is by no means in such a bad condition as you think; it will stand many a day yet."

"Aye, aye, many a day," echoed the other two architects, dutifully, as they followed their patron out of the building. The door closed behind them with an echoing sound; then stillness fell again, only broken by the drowsy buzzing of the big cathedral flies. Gibbons returned to his work, meditating, as he carved, on what had just passed.

So this was the great Dr. Wren, of whose mathematical discoveries he had heard so much, whose great talents were the talk of the town; this little man with the calm voice, who submitted so quietly to suppression by a set of men incapable of understanding the magnitude of his plans. How *could* he take it so quietly? How—— A heavy sigh behind him broke in upon the lad's reflection. He looked up quickly, and saw the object of his thoughts gazing sorrowfully at the beautiful erection he had set on paper, but which the late dictum of those in power gave him little hopes of ever beholding in more substantial form. A mist seemed to come between him and the fair drawing, for he drew his hand over his eyes and sighed again, a weary, heavy sigh. Then he thrust the roll into his deep pocket, and began pacing the silent aisle, lost in a gloomy thought.

So he *did* care. Strange that this great man,

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flattered, admired by half Europe, could not find room for the exercise of his talents, must submit to have his projects nipped in the bud like other men—like the poor carver himself. Thus thought Gibbons, and half echoed the sigh as he again handled his sharp little instruments.

Did the architect hear the long-drawn breath? It seemed so, for he stopped in his walk, and presently the lad heard steps coming slowly up the aisle towards the place where he was sitting. His heart beat at the sound. It almost seemed to him as if Dr. Wren had heard what was passing in his mind. Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, faster and faster beat the young carver's heart; he would not look up, but he *felt* that the great man was standing over him. His hand shook, the delicate instrument which he was handling slipped, and severed a petal from the nearly-completed pomegranates.

"What a pity!" said the firm voice beside him, in a tone of real regret. Then Gibbons looked up quickly, and flushed crimson as he met the gaze of eager interest in the fine face above him. "What a pity!" repeated the young architect, for he was scarcely more than thirty, though already more famous than scores of learned doctors twice his age. "I fear it is *my* fault; I startled you."

"Oh, never mind, sir," returned Gibbons, hurriedly; "it is only a model."

"Only a model? hem, good work to spend on that. You have plenty of time on your hands, it seems." This might have been either a remark or a question: Gibbons took it as the latter.

"Aye, sir, too much by half."

"What! such a skilful workman, and no employment? How comes that, my lad?"

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"Ah, sir, it seems to me that what you are pleased to term skill does not go far nowadays; even your honour——" He stopped short; what right had he to allude to a conversation not meant to be overheard.

"So you heard what they said to me just now? Aye, my lad, you do not stand alone. It is the fate of most men in this weary world of ours to be overlooked and misunderstood; to have their projects slighted and laid aside, even though they be designed for the glory of God. It *is* hard, my lad, and yet——" the fine eyes took a far-away look as they gazed up to the lofty roof of the choir. "It is best so, perhaps; if those projects *are* really for His glory, they will be carried out in due time. Patience; if He above wants us, we shall not be forgotten; the required instrument is never left to rust. Nor will *you* be, my lad," he continued, after a pause; "such a knack as yours is not given for nothing. I wish I could help you, but——" He thought a moment, then, taking out his note-book, "Here, your name and address; I may be able to do something, and who knows?" he added, cheerfully, as the great clock chimed the hour for afternoon service, the bells awoke, and the old verger bustled in to prepare; "who knows? I *may* be allowed to build my dome after all; and if so, you shall share in the work, Master Gibbons. These old stalls sadly need repairs, and your work will not disgrace the original carving." He smiled at the flash of delight which sprang to the artist's eyes, and followed the old verger, who, brimful of importance at the unusual honour, conducted the great man to a seat.

Like one in a dream Gibbons collected his tools, carried his basket to a retired corner, and knelt down.

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Like figures in a dream the train of clergy and choristers filed in, and the half-dozen scattered worshippers passed to their seats before his dreamy eyes. The prayers, the lessons, the chanting, passed like waves of sweet harmony over his exulting spirit, attuned to every note of praise and thanksgiving which rose from choir and organ; and when the *Magnificat* began, the lad lifted up his voice, and sang for joy with all his heart and soul.

"Comfort us again now after the time that Thou hast plagued us: and for the years wherein we have suffered adversity," sang the choir as an anthem.

"Show Thy servants Thy work: and their children Thy glory.

"And the glorious majesty of the Lord our God be upon us: prosper Thou the work of our hands upon us, O prosper Thou our handiwork."

How those last words rang in the lad's ears as he left the cathedral and turned homewards! Was it then coming at last? He had secured the goodwill of the great Dr. Wren, had heard him say he would do his best to serve him. What more could be wanting? Visions of the fine old carving in St. Paul's, blossoming anew in all its former luxuriance of flower and garland, danced before the young artist's eyes, restored to all its pristine beauty, and by his hand! *His—could* it be? Good-bye to poverty, good-bye to obscurity, with all their grinding oppression, humiliation, and suffering; good-bye to old Master Simeon, he should have a better patron now. So thought Gibbons as, absorbed in a radiant dream of coming happiness, he sprang up the dark, creaking staircase of his dingy lodgings, whistling a gay air and boisterously swinging his basket of tools. As he

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threw open the door, he was brought to a sudden stop; a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a rough voice said:

"Grinling Gibbons, I arrest you in the King's name!"

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CHAPTER XIX

To the Depths Beneath

"Gluck und Glas
Wie schnell bricht das!"
"Luck and glass
Break soon, alas!"
GERMAN PROVERB.

"Among
The thickest billows of that living storm
I plunged."
SHELLEY—"The Triumph of Life."

THE glass-seller of Eastern story was not more rudely awakened from his dream of fortune, by the crash of his falling wares, than was poor Gibbons by these ominous words. He started back with a smothered exclamation, and made an instinctive movement to shake off the hand which lay upon his shoulder. In vain; the strong grasp only tightened. Then Gibbons looked up, and his scared, bewildered eyes, dazzled with the sunshine of the outer world, made out the forms of three burly constables, one of whom dangled a pair of manacles in a threatening manner before him. A sudden horror seized upon the lad, a horror of chains and imprisonment. With a desperate effort he wrenched himself free, and placed his back against the wall in the blind impulse of self-defence. Vain hope. Three armed men were before him; he was driven into a corner; escape was hopeless.

"Come, come, young man, none of this," exclaimed the constable, roughly. "Give in quietly, or on go the bracelets."

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The poor lad cast one despairing glance round the room. Poor little room, that he had almost despised a moment ago, in his dream of coming fortune; how he loved it now, now that he must leave it, perhaps for ever; for arrests were something terrible in those dark times, when justice was so hard to gain. Here he had worked and struggled—work so sweet, struggles so easy, as it now seemed to him in the light of a happy past; for then he was free, and now—— There was the little window where he had sat with Silvio; there the carving he had so carefully laid down, scarce three hours ago; when should he touch it again, when finish the cherished work?—ah! when, indeed? The sight of that carving was too much for the lad, it almost maddened him.

"What have I done?" he demanded, fiercely. "I have a right to know, and I *will*."

"Softly, softly," returned the constable, making a movement to seize him by the arm. "Come along quietly with us, and you'll see fast enough."

Gibbons set his teeth resolutely.

"Not till you show me your warrant; I'm not going to be forced away till I see that; and," he added vehemently, "I don't believe you can show one."

"Oh, is that all?" rejoined the constable. "Let him have a sight of the writing, Kennedy, and let's be off; we've wasted time enough already."

One of the assistants took out the official paper, and held it ostentatiously before the young man's eyes. Yes, it was all correct; signed and sealed by a magistrate in due form, authorising the constables to seize the person of Grinling Gibbons. To *seize the person of Grinling Gibbons!* The lad's cheeks flamed; his heart beat to suffocation. He, free and

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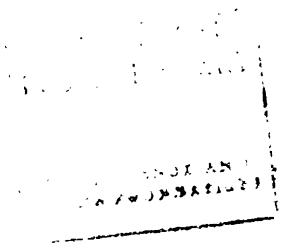

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THE ARREST.

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independent from boyhood, earning his own bread by honest work, beholden to no man for bite or sup; *he* to be seized in this way, for he knew not what! He could not bear it, and he *would* not.

Seeing the look of obstinate determination on the young man's face, the constable made a sign to his assistants to put on the handcuffs. Scarcely knowing what he did, Gibbons raised his hand to strike the man; but at that moment his eye, ranging hastily around the room in the vain hope of a loophole for escape, was caught by the old cartoon. A straggling sunbeam entering by the little window fell full on the suffering Face. How those Eyes seemed to meet his, full of an inexpressible look of pleading love! How eloquently did those outstretched Hands and pierced Feet speak to his angry spirit! "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." These words flashed through the lad's mind almost like a reproach. His hand dropped by his side; he was conquered. Without another word he suffered the astonished constables to lead him away.

Again he moved as in a dream; but what a different one! Only a few minutes before he had walked through those very streets, treading as though on air, with a kindly feeling for every one who passed him, a heart as light as a feather, and a mind full of fancies, born of hope. *Now* his very heart felt like lead; lead seemed to weigh his feet, and a leaden grey appeared to have fallen on all around; the very atmosphere seemed full of it. And yet, poor boy, the sun was shining still, though he did not know it; he only felt that the sun of hope had set with him for ever.

So absorbed was he in his misery that he never noticed a little knot of men, who, having apparently waited for the constables at the street-door, joined

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them as they came out, and followed at a distance of five or six paces along the streets. As they proceeded, one man after another joined the group, till, by the time the constables and their prisoner reached the magistrate's house, the modest train had swelled to a considerable following.

But Gibbons saw nothing. With eyes fixed on the ground, and a mind stunned by the sudden fall from hope to despair, he moved on between his conductors, through the streets, up the stairs, and into the presence of the magistrate, scarcely knowing what he did. Footsteps followed him up the stairs; groups of men took their places in the room; there came a sound of voices. Gibbons looked up. The magistrate, a stern, sour-faced personage, was speaking shortly, sharply, as though he had much business to transact, and little time to do it in. The examination began. With a strong effort, Gibbons collected his bewildered senses, and answered clearly and briefly the few questions put to him. His name, occupation, place of abode, &c., were given without hesitation; but the accusation brought against him broke the forced composure of the lad. The colour flew to his face: he clenched his hand, and made a step forwards.

"Tampering with the Dutch! Betraying secrets!" he exclaimed. "It is false! I never——"

"Silence!" said the magistrate, sternly.

Gibbons bit his lip to keep down the torrent of indignant words which rushed to his tongue. For a moment his whole senses were absorbed in a desperate effort for self-control, and he did not at once observe that a witness had been called up. The peculiar tone of the voice speaking, however, and one or two of the words spoken, recalled his attention,

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fixed it painfully, and brought back the rush of indignant feeling, which again almost mastered him. Could he believe his ears? How was it possible that any one could weave such a tissue of lies to wreck the good name of an unknown stranger? And yet how fearfully likely it sounded; truth and falsehood so artfully woven together, that the wisest might have been deceived.

An unknown stranger—*could* he be so? Gibbons gazed fixedly at the weather-beaten face and gaunt form of the speaker; they seemed strangely familiar to him, and yet he could not recall when he had seen them. The ring of the voice, the peculiar intonation on some of the syllables, all seemed an echo from some previous hearing. But when? How? That strange, irritable feeling of searching after a name, a knowledge which all of us have experienced some time in our lives: that straining after the shadow of a fact, which *will* play hide-and-seek in the corners of the brain, came over Gibbons, and prevented him from catching all the well-concocted story of the witness; till once more his attention was recalled by a name, which fell on his ear like an echo from the grave, bringing him back to outward things with a painful start. It was the name of Silvio Doria.

Gibbons' whole attention was arrested. With aching intentness he listened to the whole history of his friendship with the little Italian. All the trifling events which had marked its course; the small incidents of his daily life; nay, even parts of the innocent conversations they had held together—all were recounted with a cunning mixture of falsehood, calculated to throw a suspicious light over the whole. Then came a break in the chain of evidence. The witness had gone to sea, he said, had served under

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his Royal Highness the Duke of York, and been wounded in the King's service. He pointed to his arm, which hung in a sling, and retired into the background, amid a buzz of applause.

Again the torturing feeling came over Gibbons. *How* could the man know all this? He must have lived near him, and seen him every day; and yet, *where?* One or two other witnesses were called up, men whom Gibbons knew—the dealer from whom he bought his wood, and others of that sort—but not much information was to be drawn from them. They could only corroborate some of the facts mentioned by the first witness, and add little incidents from their own knowledge; but Gibbons felt that they did this under the influence of the principal witness; and that even their insignificant testimony was coloured by a strong belief, which helped to blacken his conduct in the eyes of the magistrate.

Before the last of these had done speaking, a stir near the door announced a new-comer. Gibbons turned his head to see who this might be, and beheld the meagre figure and sharp, cunning face of Master Simeon. Another witness against him — another enemy! The lad's heart sank within him; for he knew the little Jew too well to imagine he could have come with any good intentions towards him.

The magistrate glanced sharply at the new witness. He was not over pleased to see him appear; for he had already quite made up his mind as to the prisoner's guilt, and wished to clear him off to prison, that room might be made for the next accused—a batch of refractory seamen, several suspected Papists, and a brace of disorderly brawlers, of whom there were a goodly number under the reign of the Merry Monarch. The little Jew's testimony was, moreover, of a tedious

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nature, though spiteful enough to wreck a cause twice as hopeful as that of poor Gibbons. Tired out at length, the magistrate cut him short in the midst of a long sentence about the prisoner's "ungrateful cupidity; *such* a return for the kind encouragement he had given him. He could believe anything of the young dog after that. And, as his worship would see," &c., &c. The magistrate turned hastily to Gibbons, as though wishing to hurry over a necessary form as quickly as possible, and asked if he had anything to say for himself.

"Nothing, sir," answered Gibbons, hopelessly; "only that there must be some terrible mistake, or I have more enemies than I thought for. God knows, I am innocent; but——"

"Well, well, well; time enough for that when your trial comes on. Meanwhile I have heard quite enough to commit you to Newgate, to await—by-the-bye, though, does any one know what has become of this Silvio Doria?" No one knew. All trace of him had been lost a twelvemonth since. The magistrate turned to Gibbons. "What has become of your accomplice? Take care, young man, no concealments; lying will not help you now."

"Sir, he is dead." The lad's voice was low, and trembling almost beyond control.

"Dead! Indeed? When was that?"

"Last year—of the plague."

The magistrate hem'd. Evidently he did not misdoubt the sad reality of the simple statement.

"Well, then, we must be content with *you*, I suppose. Dead men can't plot. Grinling Gibbons, I commit you to Newgate, to await your trial. Constables, remove the prisoner." He hastily signed a paper, tossed it to an officer, and motioned them away.

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The examination had been a most informal one, even for the scanty justice of that lawless time. Even the constables noticed it; and Gibbons heard them whisper to each other, as they led him downstairs, "The Lord Mayor gives a banquet to-night. His worship seems to fear he won't despatch the prisoners in time to take the haunch of venison at its best." The jest seemed to tickle their fancy, for they laughed softly, and winked knowingly, as they hurried their prisoner unceremoniously to the outer door, little heeding that what seemed a good joke to them was a very different matter to the victim.

Carelessly they opened the door, thinking only of taking their prisoner as quickly as might be to Newgate, disposing of him, and then lingering for a gossip and a dram with the jailers, with whom they were well acquainted. But once outside the house, they saw a spectacle which put all their carelessness to flight. A crowd filled the entire space before the magistrate's residence. A sea of human faces, closely packed, silent, all but motionless, watching the door, patiently, pitilessly, as a cat at a mouse-hole.

The constables looked at each other in terror-stricken dismay, hurriedly grasped their prisoner by the arms, and turned to re-enter the house. It was too late. The door, which they had carelessly drawn after them, closed with a loud clap, and left them standing on the steps without, face to face with the crowd.

At the sight of Gibbons the silence of expectation was suddenly broken. Like the roll of an incoming tide, the enormous mass heaved forward with a roar, mighty, terrible as the ocean itself. Up two steps swept the wave of living beings; then, as though drawn back by those behind, it retreated again to its

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former position, with a deep murmur of angry feeling, and stood facing the prisoner, in that strange pause which sometimes falls upon human as well as natural tempests.

Gibbons turned deadly pale. He remembered, ah! how well he remembered just such another crowd, when Silvio was the object of its awful rage, and *he* had saved him. Ah, who would save *him*, now that *his* hour had come?

The lad's breath came fast and thick; he glanced around for a way of escape. There was none. His position seemed hopeless, yet he resolved not to give in without a struggle. By some happy chance, thanks, probably, to his quiet submission, his hands were unbound; he was on the steps, moreover, raised therefore above the crowd, and one or two should fall ere he went down. It would gain time, at all events; and who knows? Those within might hear, might open in time to save him. He turned again towards the crowd, and stood with his arms folded, and his lips tightly compressed; a strange, awful calm stealing over him, broken only by the wild beating of his heart, which told off the moments of that terrible pause like the strokes of a knell.

Meanwhile the constables, with their backs to the crowd, were belabouring the door with hand and foot, and calling loudly for admittance; but their voices were swallowed up in the deep, angry murmur of the people; and, the magistrates' room being in a distant part of the house, there was little chance of their calls being heard in time. They had the effect of rousing the people, however. The fear that their victim might be snatched from before their very eyes broke the momentary spell which had held them for an instant in check, and again the mass surged forward,

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with wild cries of "Down with him, down with him! Death to the traitor!"

A woman's hand was the first stretched out to pull down the victim of the people's rage. A sailor's wife, borne forward as much, perhaps, by her own passion as by the force of numbers behind her, sprang up the steps, and, seizing Gibbons by the arm, lifted towards him a face thin with famine, worn with watching, and convulsed with the pangs of a breaking heart, roused to revenge.

"Look at me!" she shrieked; "look at me, traitor! mean, greedy trafficker in human flesh and blood. *See* what you have made me! I was fair and happy once; wife of as good a husband as woman could wish, and mother of——" she choked, and with a sharp cry, "Oh, my boys, my boys! lost—lost——" fell at Gibbons' feet in a dead faint. Struck with pity, even in the midst of his own danger, Gibbons stooped to raise the miserable woman, and place her out of reach of the trampling feet, but in the same instant a stone struck the wall behind him, and warned him to be on his guard. Once more the lad stood upright, facing the crowd, awaiting his fate.

The sight of his calm demeanour and set white face seemed to madden the people. Stones and mud flew in all directions, and shouts of "Death to the traitor!" "Down with the Hollanders' spy!" rent the air.

"No, no!" exclaimed a voice from the midst; "let's send him to plot with the spiders, as Jack Foster said."

"Aye, aye; why should we stain our hands with blood? Newgate'll settle him. Let's send him to plot with the spiders." But these merciful voices were few and far between, and were soon drowned by

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the bloodthirsty roar, swelling louder and louder: "Death to the traitor!"

"Come, lads, what are you waiting for?" exclaimed one of the most gaunt and famished-looking of the many sailors among the crowd; "pull down the young dog, and have done with it. The magistrate's people'll be coming out presently, and he'll escape us after all. What! you're not frightened of the young villain, are you? Come on, messmates; down with the traitor." He made a rush forward; and the mob, stung by his speech, followed in a mass, yelling out his last words, till the surrounding houses rang again: "Down with the traitor! Death, death!"

A head is thrust from the window. A voice shrieks to the crowd—"Hold, hold, in his Majesty's name! Hold, fools, in the name of the King!"

Fool rather he who measures his weak voice against the roar of the sea, and stretches out no hand to save the drowning wretch. The voice is lost among the roar of the maddened people. They stop not to listen or look upwards; not they.

"Open the door!" shout the constables, making vehement signs to the man above. Will he understand? No, he goes on shouting to the unheeding mob. Yes, he sees—he understands. The head vanishes from the window—he is coming.

For a few minutes the lad keeps his position. The first few assailants fall back before his well-aimed blows; but what can one man do against thousands? It cannot last. A stone strikes his right arm; it falls powerless by his side. Yet the door opens; he may be pulled in in time. *Too late.*

"Never! Death to the traitor! Death, death!"

The people *will* not lose their victim.

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A desperate rush—a well-aimed stone—at last they have him. He is down.

"Oh my God, have mercy upon me!"

The cry went up from the depths of Gibbons' heart. The yells of the populace deafened him. The mob seemed to reel confusedly before his eyes; one face, only one standing out from the mass, lit with the fearful joy of satisfied revenge.

Yes, he knew him now, his accuser; one, seldom there, and scarcely noticed among the many dwellers in his crowded court, and—the ringleader of the mob who would have killed Silvio.

The recognition flashed across the lad's mind, like the strange photograph of life across the memory of a drowning man. It was the last thing he saw. There came a hum in his ears; a terrible sensation of being trampled underfoot—a sick, helpless, dreadful feeling, as though life were being crushed out of him—then he sank below the surface of that awful sea, and knew no more.

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CHAPTER XX

Plotting with The Spiders

" The spider spins her web, whether she be
In poet's tower, cellar, or barn, or tree;
Whilst I——"
Shelley's " Letter to Maria Gisborne."

Four narrow walls, lit by a tiny lamp, a bare stone floor, an arched roof, and a heavy barred window, deep set in the wall—this was what appeared to the eyes of Gibbons as he slowly re-opened them on life. He turned his head on the hard pillow where it lay. His brain swam, sparks of fire seemed to dance before his eyes, and the narrow prospect vanished. He put his hand to his head; how it beat! how vacant and bewildered it felt! He tried to think, to wonder what had happened, and where he was; but that was beyond him. He could only lie still with his eyes shut—still, half stunned, helplessly passive. So the minutes passed.

A grating sound in the lock, a key turned, a murmur of voices speaking in low tones; then a hand under his pillow and a sensation as of something forced between his lips. The action was repeated once, twice, thrice. Then his head was replaced on the pillow, and gradually, very gradually, the warm blood began to tingle in his stiff limbs; the whirling, giddy beating in his head lessened, and again he opened his eyes. Two men were bending over him. A grave physician in a black robe held his hand upon his heart, and counted the beats by the dial of a portly watch contained in the other, while a tall, broad-shouldered jailer knelt on

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the floor with a bottle by his side, and a tea-spoon poised between thumb and finger.

"Twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five," counted the doctor. "The heart is becoming more regular, suspended animation is regaining its sway. The patient will do."

"Any bones broken, doctor?" The physician examined Gibbons' body, felt him here, felt him there, and shook his head cheerfully.

"No, no, nothing of the sort. Plenty of bruises, but all the bones are sound, and I cannot discover any internal injury. Do you feel any pain, my lad? Breathe hard and see." Gibbons obeyed with an involuntary smile.

"Nothing to speak of, sir; but I *do* feel stiff and sore."

The jailer laughed, with gruff amusement. "'Twould be a wonder if you didn't, my young spark. Folks cannot be trampled upon without a bruise or two; good faith they can't, ha, ha!"

"'Tis a miracle," exclaimed the doctor. "Dragged from beneath the feet of a crowd, and not a bone broken. You have much to be thankful for, young man." Then the recollection of what had happened broke upon Gibbons' mind. He shuddered.

"I remember now," he said; "it was terrible. I thought the people had trampled me to death."

"Not so bad as that," said the jailer, chuckling. "But they *would* have done it very soon, if the magistrate's people hadn't come out in the nick of time, driven back the dozen wolves who had you down upon the steps, and dragged you into the house, as they thought, dead as a herring—and so you would have been in a twinkling. A minute more and it would have been too late. They would never have managed it

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at all, though, *never*, if some of the crowd hadn't been against killing you, for the most of them were just mad with rage. Aye, you may thank your stars; you *have* had an escape." Gibbons drew a shuddering breath.

"And how came I here?" he asked.

"Here? Oh, you were committed, you know, for playing the spy, or something of that sort. Nay" (as Gibbons uttered an indignant exclamation), "I know nothing about *that*; don't make *me* your father confessor. All I know is that his worship the magistrate was in a pretty taking; what with having exposed your life through neglect of a proper escort (for which he might lose his place, I reckon, as he knew well enough how mad the people were against you), and what with fear that the mob might bring the house about his ears, for they were hammering at the door, howling like a pack of wolves. So he smuggled you out through the back door, and packed you off here in a coach, thinking that if you were found for dead in Newgate there would be no such great talk about the matter. Deaths are not uncommon here, you know. And they're rather inconvenient in gentlemen's houses, 'specially when they happen *your* way."

The doctor turned to the talkative jailer, and cut him short.

"Enough, friend; you needn't excite the patient at present. He'd be all the better for a good sleep; and as we've done all that's required, we'd better be going."

So saying, he pocketed his portly watch, and turned towards the door, followed by the jailer, who, thinking himself safe from observation, took a sly pull at the medicine-bottle before he locked and bolted the door, and left the prisoner to solitude. Probably, as

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Gibbons could not help conjecturing, it was to that same medicine, enjoyed in company with the constables, that he owed this very circumstantial story of his rescue, for the gift of conversation is certainly not usually common among the jailer species.

As the effects of his encounter with the mob wore off, Gibbons began to experience that terrible feeling of monotony, that irritable feeling of restraint, which imprisonment cannot fail to bring upon the high-spirited and free. From hour to hour, from day to day, no other prospect than those four bare walls, that bare stone floor; no other variety than the daily entrance of the jailer, now taciturn enough, and the stealthy march of the sunbeams, which struggled in at the little window, and crept slowly, slowly along the floor, tracing the narrow square with its cross-bars in various diagrams of perspective, now straight, now slanting, then receding obliquely, till finally they mounted the wall, gilding the cold stones for a short space with a warm glow, and then disappeared in the vanishing point.

It was the same at night, only then the painting was in silver instead of gold, and for a few precious minutes the prisoner had a sight of the moon's fair face looking in at his high window, calm and pitying as the face of an angel. Oh! how he grieved when a cloud came between, and left his heart and cell in hopeless darkness!

Then through the quiet hours he still heard the strokes of the bell of old St. Paul's, measuring the hours, with its grave, deep note. Sometimes it seemed to him like a friend—a companion speaking to him in his prison, as it used to do in his attic-studio when he felt tired and dispirited, saying cheerily that better times were coming, darkness could not last for ever.

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Were not the hours passing one by one? And with the flight of each the day was nearer.

But sometimes, oh, how his heart withered under its strokes! How mocking sounded that once friendly voice! Aye, the hours were passing one by one, one by one; life was going on outside, busily, happily, each man pursuing his course, whether of industry or pleasure, while he—— And no one cared—no one. He might die here, and none would be the wiser—the sadder. True, they had spoken of his trial; but what of that? Would it better his condition? No. He had heard too many stories of unjust imprisonment to hope much. Once inside the walls, Newgate seldom gave up her prisoners except to death. *Except to death!* But no, he would not think of that; it could not be that he had been rescued from the hands of the mob only to die by those of the executioner. No, he had been too near death; he had wrestled too desperately for his life to bear the thought of losing it. Bitter as it now was, disappointing as he had so often proved it, the lad still clung to it with all the strength of his young being. But life in a prison—aye, it was *that* he dreaded. To live, perhaps for years, within those four narrow walls, eating out his heart with constant fretting, wasting his existence in daily beating against the bars of his cage, losing all the chances, all the possibilities which *might* have been his but for this. Oh, it was too much!

Over and over again as he lay on his prison bed did poor Gibbons dream of his unfinished picture, working in fancy at the pomegranates, imagining the progress of leaf and flower, and rejoicing in their growth, only to awaken to the torturing thought that it was all dream-work; to hear the old clock chiming through the darkness, mocking his helplessness with

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the news that another hour was gone, that the moments were passing, passing, passing—precious moments, never to be regained—and the aim of his life was no nearer its fulfilment. Poor lad! he envied the very spiders, companions of his imprisonment, spinning so contentedly at their long threads, and weaving their cunning webs; *they* were not deprived of the means of carrying out the purpose for which their lives were given them, while *he*, whom God had intended for a carver, just as really as He had made those spiders to spin their webs, was cut off from his art, and compelled to feel the instinct of his whole being cruelly frustrated.

It was hard to bear, very hard, and we can scarcely wonder at the hate which grew up in the lad's heart against the man who, all unprovoked, had brought this upon him; nay, that sometimes, stung past endurance, he would start up and stride passionately up and down his narrow cell, with clenched hands and panting breath, kicking in his heart against the pricks which God had permitted to bar his progress.

He could scarcely have borne it, but for the remembrance of those few words of Dr. Wren's: "If these projects are really for God's glory, they will be carried out in due time. Patience; if He above wants us, we shall not be forgotten. The required instrument is never left to rust." Like the whisper of some kind spirit, those words would return upon poor Gibbons' mind, calming his rebellious mood,-and so often as they returned would he look up, as Dr. Wren had done, with a whispered petition for that patience which he so sorely needed. And so the days passed on till he had been a week in Newgate.

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CHAPTER XXI

A Dream and its Awakening

"Thought could not divide
The actual world from those entangling evils.

* * * * *

The sense of day and night, of false and true,
Was dead within me. Yet two visions burst
That darkness."

Shelley—"The Revolt of Islam."

It was the night of Saturday the 1st of September, and Gibbons lay sleeping on the straw mattress which served him as a bed—sleeping quietly, dreaming of freedom, in that happy forgetfulness of present ills which sleep can bring even to the most miserable.

A strong wind was blowing from the east, piping about the walls of the old prison with a steady, monotonous sound, very lulling to the tired brain of the sleeping lad, wearied out with the continual fretting of the last few days. He had not slept so quietly since his imprisonment. By degrees the piping of the wind mingled with the dream-pictures which were floating across his passive brain, reality and imagination blending together in that fantastic union which is so well known, and yet so mysterious.

The chords of a violin seemed struck by a practised hand; a long, low, monotonous wail flowed from the instrument. Who was the player? Gibbons seemed to know instinctively; and yet could it be? Even in sleep he shuddered, as the remembrance of that pit

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in the churchyard flashed across his mind. And yet that touch, that air! It *must* be. A great joy sprang up in his heart; he turned in his sleep, and clasped his hands ecstatically. He was wandering in the park, a thicket of trees was before him, *they* must conceal the musician. He entered the wood. How softly the wind whispered among the green leaves; how drowsily they rustled one against the other, while through all sounded the sweet notes of the violin, seeming to come from now here, now there, till the whole wood was full of melody.

The lad slept on, happy among the scenes of dreamland, while in the real world the wind still sighed round the prison walls, now dying to a murmur, now rising to a passion of sighs.

A light stole through the prison window, pictured the bars waveringly on the floor, flickered on the wall, and played tremulously over the sleeper's face. Imagination touched it with her enchanted wand, and transformed it into a sheaf of sunbeams, which the wind scattered through the leaves at the dreamer's feet. He followed the sound of the violin, now to one part of the wood, now to another; now catching sight of a shadowy figure, now losing it among the trees. It was playing "Onward to fame." How was it that the leaves rattled so loudly against each other, as though they were accompanying the violin on the castanets? He looked up, and, behold, the foliage had turned to wood; beautiful carved wreaths and garlands, pomegranates, brambles, roses, and lilies, blending together in wonderful confusion; while through them all looked a face—the Face on the Cross.

The wind rose higher, waved the branches hither and thither till they rattled again, and hid the long-

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suffering Face in their mazy folds. Torches gleamed through the trees, red and angry, tainting the air with smoke; the wood was full of cries, "Down with the traitor! Death, death!" "Burn the little Papist-foreigner! Smoke him out!" Torches were waved in the air, the flame caught the wooden leaves, and leapt from one to the other, till the wood was in a blaze. How it roared and crackled! The beautiful carving, the work of months, it would all be burnt!—all; and the carver must look on helplessly! The sleeper groaned. The cries in the wood redoubled. "Down with the traitor! Death, death!" What was his work to his friend? The artist turned from the sight of the burning leaves, and fled through the wood to warn the fugitive musician. But as he ran the musician ran too—faster, faster, dodging now behind one tree, now another. The wood would be burnt; they would both perish. At last he stops—at last. Panting for breath, the carver stretches out his hand to grasp the fugitive; he turns his face and reveals—the face of a skeleton! With a wild cry Gibbons awoke. The dream-figures fled away; imagination vanished, reality resumed its way. The spell was broken.

But *was* it quite broken? Gibbons rubbed his eyes, and looked round his cell. Strange, the light still gleamed and flickered on the wall, the magic light which he had seen in his dream. Was he still half asleep? or did the glamour yet linger on his eyes, printed on the retina, as, after long gazing on the flame of a candle, we still seem to see it after we have turned away? Gibbons put his hand over his eyes a moment, then removed it and looked again. The light was still there, brighter if anything than before, making the shadow of the window-bars tremble,

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waver, move upon the wall, as though they had suddenly become endowed with life.

Was it the moon? No. Gibbons had watched her too often steal in at his prison window, pay her nightly visit, and steal out again, to mistake her calm, steady, silvern light for this wild, lurid gleam. And, besides, it was not the time. No, for at that moment came the iron voice from old St. Paul's, breaking the silence of the night with two deep-sounding notes, rippling the sleeping air, and dying away, softer, fainter, like the circles on a smooth pond disturbed by a stone. And still the light flickered and danced on the wall, and the faint smell of smoke came in at the unglazed window.

A fire—yes, that must be it; most likely among the houses which clustered thickly by the riverside. There were cries in the street, but distant ones; the light on the wall was growing fainter; they must be getting it under—easy enough when water was so near. "How I wish I were there!" thought Gibbons, picturing the busy scene—the cool night-air, the lights dancing on the river, the stir, the bustle, the spice of danger. What a relief it would be from the monotonous prison life! "What a pity it is so far away! if it were nearer the jail there might be a chance of its catching fire; I might escape in the confusion, and then, and then—if—yes—perhaps——" Again he fell asleep, and slept till the creaking bolts announced the entrance of the jailer with his daily food. Gibbons started up, and looked at the wall; a faint glow still rested there, not bright and distinct as last night, but faint in the sunshine, as the shadow of a dream.

"A fire?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the jailer, carelessly, setting

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down the plate and pitcher; "in Pudding Lane, at the house of Faryner, his Majesty's baker, down by the river. Several other houses were burnt down last night; but I dare say they will soon get it under. Water's plenty there, i'faith." He turned away, barred the door, and went to feed some more of his jail-birds, leaving Gibbons to his breakfast and his own reflections.

These were to-day of a more stirring and less personal nature, owing to the fire, which, spite the assurance of the jailer, was *not* soon got under. On the contrary, the cries and hubbub in the street increased as the day went on. The air became more and more tainted with smoke, and as the daylight waned the weird glow on the wall returned with doubled intensity, and the tiny square of sky, which was all that could be seen through the high window, gleamed blood-red, blotting out the stars and drowning the moonlight.

No sleep for Gibbons that night. He lay on his bed watching the shadows of the bars upon the wall, listening to the increasing noise without—the shouts of men, the shrill cries of women and children, breaking through the moans of the wind, which still piped round the prison walls, accompanying the distant roar of the fire with its melancholy voice. Gibbons began to grow uneasy. Suppose the fire *should* spread to Newgate; the prisoners might be burnt alive in the prison before they could all be released. It was not a pleasant thought. He listened anxiously for the arrival of the jailer, who was late that day, and came in with a troubled look on his usually unruffled countenance. He was in a hurry, and gave very short answers to Gibbons' eager inquiries. "Yes, the fire was not out yet, but it soon would be," he

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thought. "Danger of catching Newgate? O no; Gibbons needn't flatter himself he was going to leave the old place so soon—that he needn't." And off went the jailer, slamming the door and shooting the bolts in a manner utterly unlike his usual plodding way of going the rounds.

Gibbons' vague anxiety grew. The jailer was uneasy, he could see. Did they really dread the burning of the jail? It seemed so; and was there not cause? The ever-increasing roar of the fire, the noise of falling buildings, of carts driven rapidly through the streets; the thick cloud of smoke which rolled in at the window—all gave a dreadful answer to his mental question.

Again the night fell, but it did not bring darkness; it did but make the red glow of the fire more terrible as it shone into the little cell, making it as light as day. A horrible dread took possession of the prisoner. The smell of burning had grown so strong, so suffocating, the roar of the fire so loud. Surely it must be coming very near. He should be burnt alive, like a rat in a trap, powerless to help himself. It was dreadful. In vain he shook the door, and called to the jailer. No one came; the only answer was the cry of the prisoners in the neighbouring cells, possessed by the same wild fear as himself, and the crackling, rushing sound of the flames without. What should he do? He looked up at the little window; it was very high, certainly, but was there no chance of his reaching it? Such a thought had passed through his mind several times since his imprisonment, but had always been rejected as impracticable; and besides, such was the thickness of the bars, such the watchfulness of the jailers, that, even could he have reached it, there seemed little hope of escape. But

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now. Perhaps the only chance of life lay in that direction. He did not know what might be its height from the ground outside, nor how near the fire had come, but if he could only gain the window he should see. But he would wait a little longer; the jailer's visit was almost due; and the authorities might intend removing the prisoners at once. Yes, he would wait. He waited, but in vain. The hour struck, passed, struck again, and yet again; but no jailer. Only the cries of the prisoners became more despairing, and the roar of the fire waxed louder and louder.

Forgotten! What more likely? The prison was crowded. The difficulty of removing so many captives, some of them desperate ruffians, would be great. It would probably be put off till the last moment, and then some might be overlooked in the hurry; it might be too late to visit every cell, and *his* might be among the number. A cold shudder passed over the lad. Come what would, he *must* make the effort. The window. He went up to it, stood against the wall, and measured it with his height. It was several feet above his head. He sprung upwards. No, his fingers could not reach the ledge of the embrasure. He must raise himself; but with what? His eye fell upon his bed, the only thing which the room contained; it was merely a low truckle-bed, but it might help. He dragged it out, mounted upon it, and again tried to reach the window. Still several inches between his utmost grasp and the window-ledge. Was it impossible? Must he indeed stay there to perish? He hesitated; was there nothing more on which he could mount? Ah! the water-pitcher; an earthenware one, certainly—but still, for one moment—— He placed the jug on the bed-

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stead, and rested half his weight cautiously upon it. Yes, it might do; but there was something else, absolutely necessary for his escape, which he must see about before attempting to reach the window—a rope. Where was this to come from? He looked around. There was his blanket. He seized it from the bed, tore it into strips, and knotted them together, the firelight all the while shadowing every action grotesquely on the opposite wall; then winding the coil round his waist, he mounted his little scaffolding, rested one foot upon the water-jug, and stretching upward grasped the ledge. There was a sound of broken crockery. Gibbons hung suspended. But it was now or never. His step was destroyed; once down, he could never reach that position again. He gathered all his strength, closed his fingers convulsively on the ledge, and swung himself upwards. A moment more, and he found himself squeezed, breathless and trembling, into the narrow aperture of the thick wall. The window was high up, and looked towards the Thames. He looked out, and his panting breath came faster. His utmost imagination had not pictured half the horror of that dreadful scene. And yet there was an awful beauty about it; a fearful splendour, such as none but a gigantic fire-picture can present.

From the water's edge, right up the hill towards Cheapside, stretched a broad belt of fire, like a flaming rainbow spanning the city, growing longer, broader, more intensely brilliant every moment. Churches were burning from their spires downward, glowing pyramids of flame pointing up to heaven. Houses were blazing in long lines of light; tongues of fire darting from one to the other with devouring swiftness, feeding greedily on the closely-packed wooden

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tenements, dry as tinder after the long spell of summer weather. Here and there a glowing mountain showed the presence of some large public building, burning from roof to basement, one mass of fire, heating the air around it, till it quivered in the glare. A strong wind still blew from the eastward, driving the fire before it in sheets of flame, its moaning voice almost drowned by the roar and crackle of the great conflagration, which it was doing its utmost to further. From time to time a bright blue flame rushed upwards from the direction of Thames Street as the fire reached the stores of oil and spirits in the many warehouses by the river-side; while a shower of brilliant sparks shooting up to heaven, followed by a deafening report, proclaimed to every ear in London the explosion of some powder-magazine.

If the sight below were terrible, that above was even more so. The whole arch of heaven seemed to be on fire, full of blood-red flames, "like the top of a burning oven;" * the lurid glare lighting up the very smoke hanging in yellow clouds over the city, and showing in awful contrast with the moon's pale face, which peeped through the clouds over that part of the city which the fire had not yet touched, and mingled her cold radiance with the fierce glow of the conflagration. It was an awful sight, like a foreshadowing of that day when "the elements shall melt with fervent heat."

Gibbons shuddered, and turned again to the scene which lay below him. The fire was not very far removed from his own immediate neighbourhood; Cheapside was already in flames towards the further end, and the windows of Newgate Street glittered

* Evelyn.

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with the reflection of what would in all probability be its own fate ere many hours were over. The inhabitants evidently feared as much, for the roadway was full of people removing their goods from the various houses, shouting, weeping, or scolding, as their different natures prompted them.

Yes, it was coming, no doubt of it—coming quickly and surely; but how was he, a captive, to escape from the horrible fate which threatened him? Gibbons turned his eyes from the vast and awful picture, to reconnoitre the ground which lay immediately below the window. It looked upon the high wall surrounding the courtyard of the prison, here of narrow dimensions, owing to the closely-packed houses outside. Within this court, and immediately below the window, was the roof of a building adjoining the main body of the jail, used as lodgings for the various officials; and several narrow loop-holes, communicating with the different cells, slit the face of the wall between. Once outside the window, Gibbons saw at once how these would help him in his descent. With the aid of his improvised rope he might drop from one to another of these ledges, and thus reach the roof below; and then the short distance between that and the outer wall—— The prisoner's heart beat high as he traced his road to liberty.

Once outside. Yes, but how to get there? His heart sank as he looked at those massive iron bars. It was like a bird in its cage, beating its wings against the wires, and fancying itself up and away in the blue heavens, cleaving its path through the sunshine. Almost hopelessly, half mechanically, he grasped one of the iron bars and shook it. A great flake of rust came off under his hand; it moved. Gibbons breathed hard. The bars were very old,

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evidently; their massive strength was but outward show, for they were eaten to the very centre by the subtle tooth of rust. He grasped the next, with the same result; then put forth all his strength, and shook the bar till he was forced to stop for breath. The iron trembled in the socket; the rust peeled off in flakes, and fell tinkling on the roof below; but still the bar resisted. And all the while the east wind drove the fire nearer, nearer. Again Gibbons wrenched and shook the iron; again, and yet again. Twice the hour sounded from old St. Paul's—*Twelve —One.* At last, when hope was almost gone, there was a sudden snap, and the bar broke off right in the middle, and fell with a crash on the roof below. Then there was hope. Yes, if one bar had given way, why not the others? But he must be more careful; another such accident, and his whole plan might be ruined. With a trembling heart and a beating pulse Gibbons went on with his work. Two o'clock struck. Another bar gave way. One more, and he might squeeze himself through. But this was more obstinate. *Three* o'clock—*Four*, still the bar held. The white light of dawn streaked the sky to the eastward, struggling with the lurid glow and heavy smoke in sickly contrast. In another hour the sun would rise. It might be too late for him to escape undiscovered. And how near, how fearfully near, the fire was coming, rushing down Cheapside, devouring as it went! Another effort, with all the force remaining to him, and at last the bar snapped. The way was open. Cautiously Gibbons put his head through the opening; yes, there was room. Carefully he proved the knots in his blanket-rope, passed it over the remaining bar, and, holding by the two ends, let himself down. His feet touched the ledge of the first window. The process

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was repeated by fastening the cord over one of its bars; and again he was lowering himself, when a cry, a piteous cry, arose from the depths of the cell within—"Have pity! For God's sake, save me!" Gibbons paused, suspended in the air. But what could he do? An answer might arouse the jailers; and even if not, how free the captive within? Even should the circumstances which had aided his own escape be possible, there was not time. He could not help another, and he might lose himself. Some one had already discovered his flight; there was no time to lose; he *must* go forward. And, with a prayer for himself and for those he was leaving behind, Gibbons took the last drop, and found himself standing on the roof below.

He crept to the edge—cautiously, noiselessly, for there were voices in the court below; a couple of watchmen walking up and down, keeping guard. Gibbons waited till they had passed to a distant part of the court, then looked out for the narrowest point between the roof and the opposite wall. It was scarcely so near as it had appeared from the window above; but he did not wait to measure the distance, he saw it was *possible*, and that was enough; there was no time to lose. There was a slight rattle of falling mortar, a sound on the opposite wall; but the roar of the fire, the cries in the street, swallowed up the slight disturbance. The watchmen passed, turned again, and never thought of observing the dark figure which crouched behind the battlements. As they disappeared, it rose, stood for a moment in sharp outline against the fiery sky, and then the wall was tenantless, and Gibbons was sliding down the rope on the other side.

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CHAPTER XXII

FACE TO FACE

" Her lips were parted, and the measured breath
Was now heard there;—her dark and intricate eyes,
Orb within orb, deeper than sleep or death,
Absorbed the glories of the burning skies.

* * * * *

She smiled on me, and nothing then we said,
But each upon the other's countenance fed.
————————the mighty veil
Which doth divide the living and the dead
Was almost rent, the world grew dim and pale——"
SHELLEY—" The Revolt of Islam."

THE sense of freedom after captivity! Can any one describe it who has not been himself a prisoner? I think not. There must be something in the touch of the fresh wind, in the sight of the open sky, in the feeling of unrestrained motion, which we who experience them every day can never duly appreciate. Only the captive inmate of some narrow cell; only the stricken sufferer on his bed of pain, who has longed, with a longing even unto death, for one taste of God's fresh air, for the warmth of His sunshine, and has received an answer to his earnest prayer, can truly know what freedom is.

Gibbons felt it then. Even in the presence of that awful scene there was a wild joy in his heart, an exhilarating feeling which no thought of his critical position could quite overcome. He had walked almost out of sight of Newgate before he even thought of

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where he was going; and then, with a sudden flash of memory, came the remembrance of his carving. He stood still and looked upward to ascertain the progress of the fire. He had reached the lower end of Newgate Street, and was in full view of the broader thoroughfare of Cheapside, already fast disappearing under the flames, which rushed up the narrow side-streets from the direction of the river: fire meeting fire, like the torrents of smaller streams emptying themselves into a great river, already bank-full, under pressure of a roaring flood.

Towering above the surrounding houses rose the stately head of old St. Paul's, its cross and pinnacles already touched by the red light of the coming fire; its dark tower standing out in bold relief against the lurid sky. But how was it that the *western*, as well as the *eastern* front, had this strange background? Could there be *two* fires? Gibbons turned his face westward, and saw that the whole sky towards Blackfriars was equally bright with that which hung over the direction of Cheapside. The fire had worked along Thames Street by the river, and was pushing on slowly against the wind,* to join its comrade in the assault on old St. Paul's.

Gibbons' heart suddenly stopped beating, and the blood rushed to his face. Belle Sauvage Court lay in the very path of the fire; his little room, his cherished carving, might even now be the prey of those all-devouring flames; and the old cartoon—— No wonder the artist's heart trembled within him. They must be saved at all risks, if the progress of the fire had left *any* way open for gaining the court. Without waiting for further thought, Gibbons altered

* "Historical Narrative of the Fire."

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his course, struck into St. Paul's Churchyard, and hurried on towards Ludgate.

He had not gone far, when he encountered a gentleman superintending a party of workmen, who were pulling down some houses, in the hope that by making a wide gap the progress of the fire might be stopped. The men were working in frantic haste, but without any organised plan; getting into each other's way, shouting contrary directions, swearing, calling, quarrelling, so that little real progress was made with the work; while he who should have been the mainspring of all stood like a man distraught, his hair tumbled, his handkerchief hanging loose about his neck, too bewildered himself to be of the least use in directing his excited subordinates.

In this distracted functionary Gibbons recognised Sir Thomas Bludworth, the Lord Mayor, and the thought struck him that by applying to this personage he might save his fellow-prisoners in Newgate. There was a risk in this to himself, a newly-escaped prisoner, but Gibbons was not one to let a selfish fear stand in the way of helping others, where such help was possible. He stopped his hurrying pace, turned aside from his path, and accosted the Mayor respectfully. "May it please your worship to take order for the safety of the prisoners in Newgate? I have but just come down the street, and the fire is spreading fast up Cheapside; the prison cannot remain long untouched." The Mayor turned round hastily and fixed his bewildered eyes on the speaker.

"What is that?" he asked, sharply. Gibbons repeated his words. The Mayor struck his hands together, like a man driven beyond his utmost capacity.

"Lord! what can I do?" he asked, helplessly.

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"I am spent; people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses, but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it."*

"But the prisoners, your worship, the prisoners," returned Gibbons, impatiently; "could they not be removed, if the prison itself cannot be saved?"

"Yes, yes, I will see about it—presently," answered the harassed magistrate; "but I am spent; I have been up all night, and must refresh myself first." So saying, he turned once more with some contradictory order to his workmen, to which, however, they seemed to pay very little heed.

Gibbons saw the uselessness of further words, and, feeling he had done all he could, turned his back on the disorderly party, and hurried forward on his own errand. As he drew near his destination, the street became so crowded with fugitives that he had much ado to get along. Women with babies in their arms tottered forward, bending under the heavy burdens of household goods strapped upon their backs; and little children, hardly able to carry themselves, toddled along, sobbing and crying, by their mother's side, all the while embracing, with both fat arms, dicky's cage, or poor puss, whose position in her little owner's convulsive grasp must have been anything but a comfortable one. Wagons laden mountain-high with furniture stood at the doors, receiving another and another article, till the whole heterogeneous pyramid threatened to overbalance from very top-heaviness; and more than once Gibbons had to duck his head, as a portly bolster, or voluminous feather-bed, fell like a thunderbolt from an upper window into the street below, followed by the careful house-

* Pepys.

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wife's injunctions to her good man—who, with ever-increasing despair on his honest countenance, was packing the already overloaded wagon — that he "*must* find room for this also: it *could* not be left behind." And the old bed-ridden people; the pale mother with her new-born infant, brought into the world but one short hour before; the wasted sufferer with death in his face, who had never thought to pass his door again in this life—it was a heart-rending sight to see these carried from the houses, and borne away they scarce knew whither, driven from home and shelter by the advance of that terrible enemy whom none could withstand.

Thinking to reach home more quickly if out of the crowded thoroughfare, Gibbons struck into a narrow side-street, which would lead him round through the court tenanted by his old friend Master Simeon. The press of traffic here was not quite so great, but each step that he advanced the smell of burning grew upon the hot, smoke-laden air, and tiny black flakes of charred wood fell in slow showers around him. What if these were all that remained of his beautiful carving? Gibbons remembered his dream, and a cold shudder ran through him in spite of the sultry oppression of the heated atmosphere. Should he reach his home in time? Trembling with anxiety and suspense, he strained every nerve in advance. Oh, that smoke, how it choked him! Gasping for breath, he turned under the narrow archway of the old Jew's court, and then—he stood still suddenly for he was face to face with the fire.

Yes, there it was; the bright cruel flames stretching out their thousand pointed tongues from roof to roof, from window to window—leaping over the ruins of some half-demolished houses, seeming to laugh

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defiance in the hot faces of a party of workmen, who, cut short in their endeavours, stood gazing in dismay at the all-conquering invader, which had thus in a few moments rendered futile the laborious work of hours.

The leader of this party was a very different style of person to the Lord Mayor. He was a slight-figured, swarthy-complexioned man; clad, as were several of his companions, in a dress of rich material, of which, however, he seemed to take little care, for it was soiled with smoke and dust, and the lace-ruffled sleeves were pushed back at the wrist, showing a pair of hands which, though white and delicate as a lady's, bore evident token that he had not been content to superintend alone.

"Foiled again," Gibbons heard him say, as he wiped his streaming forehead with a cambric handkerchief; "foiled again, and no blame to you either, my good fellows. Oddsfish! this pulling down houses seems to do little good; the fire makes head faster than we can stop it. We must think of another plan. Methinks we waste time here, brother," he continued, turning to a tall, grave-looking gentleman on his right hand—"we can do no more good at this part, and I fear me St. Paul's must go, unless his worship the Mayor succeed with his gap better than we have done. I little thought the flames would have been upon us so soon. This cursed wind defeats all calculations! Come, gentlemen." He turned to go, but stopped in the act. "You are *sure* all these houses are empty?" he said, looking round. "All, sire; we——" the speaker was interrupted by a shrill scream from the lower end of the court, part of which was already in a bright flame; and looking quickly upwards, Gibbons saw a slight girl's figure appear at an

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upper window of the old Jew's house. He looked at the door. The fire was entering there, in greedy anticipation of the feast of old lumber, old relics, and curiosities, dry with the dust of ages, which it would find within. At the lower windows—there also were the flames reflected, nodding and beckoning to each other in the cobwebbed glass, transforming the dim little diamond panes into red-hot rubies. Then, with a strange, desperate feeling, he raised his eyes once more to the little figure at the upper window; the quaint dress, which he remembered so well, the white imploring agony of the childish face, the small hands clasped in dumb terror—all brought out in strong relief by the wild illumination of the flames. *Must* she die? Could *no* one save her?

"O Mistress Leah, Mistress Leah!" the lad murmured her name almost involuntarily, and covered his face with his hands; he could not bear to look, and rescue seemed almost hopeless; yet in the darkness before his closed eyes flashed with painful vividness another picture: that same little figure standing in the dark old shop with the treasured silver coin in her hand, and a look of tender, tearful pity in her sweet eyes—pity for him. The lad's chest heaved in the terrible struggle. It was not fear which he was combating, it was the desperate effort to relinquish *everything*—to lay down life, with all its beautiful possibilities and aspirations, for the more than vague shadow of a forlorn hope.

"Twenty gold pieces to the man who saves her!" cried the leader of the working-party, thrusting his hand into a pouch which hung at his side. The men looked at each other. They had no ladder at hand to reach the high window where the girl stood. The next house was wrapped in flames, and the fire

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had already fastened on the lower part of the old Jew's dwelling, which, being of wood, could not long withstand the all-devouring element. An entrance, indeed, might still be possible, but how pass the threshold a second time? No wonder the men looked blankly at each other; no wonder they were slow to respond to their leader's call. It seemed certain death.

"What! will *no* one save her?" cried the gentleman again, turning excitedly to his men. "Will you let the maiden burn to death before your very eyes, without raising a finger to save her? Oddsfish, gentlemen! must we show you the way ourselves?"

He made a movement forwards, but a dozen hands were stretched out to stop him.

"Sire, sire, consider——"

"Stop—*I* will go," said the grave gentleman before mentioned, stepping out of the group. The leader put his hand on his shoulder and pointed forwards.

"Too late, James; see there!"

A lad had darted from under the archway leading into the court, and was fighting his way through the flames into a burning house. A cheer broke from the men; they could admire in another what they had shrunk from undertaking themselves. Their leader bent forward, his swarthy cheek flushed with excitement, his dark eyes full of admiration for the brave deed. The lad's figure disappeared in the doorway; nothing was seen but the little figure at the window, standing in the full glare of the fire; nothing heard but the crackle and roar of the flames.

Scorched, panting, half choked with smoke, Gibbons had passed the fiery barrier, and was standing among

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the antique lumber in the little shop—the same little shop in which he had stood so often, chattering with Master Simeon; but how changed! The old dimness was no longer there; a strange red, fierce illumination filled the little den, lighting up its quaint miscellaneous contents with a splendour which had not been theirs even in their best days. Coats of armour, tarnished picture-frames, the dim gilt bindings of ancient books, all stood out strangely distinct, strangely brilliant in the weird glare which was lighting them up for the last time.

But, strange as was the effect, Gibbons, as we may well imagine, did not stop to mark it. He had never been farther than the little shop, but, conjecturing that the way to the upper stories lay behind the heavy curtain which hung across one end, he pushed it back, and found himself, as he had expected, at the foot of a steep flight of stairs.

The air was full of smoke, dim, dense, suffocating. Evidently the fire had spread to all the rooms on the lower floor. Gasping for breath, Gibbons staggered up the long flight, till he reached the highest story, where Mistress Leah had taken refuge. He opened the first door on the narrow landing. Yes, he was right; the little figure stood still in the self-same attitude at the window.

"Mistress Leah!"

The lad's voice was hoarse and trembling. She turned round with a start; then a smile of intense joy broke over the sweet child-face, and she held out her hands with a sob of relief.

"O Master Gibbons! then you are not dead? Thank God!"

Gibbons took the little white hands in his, and they stood for a moment without speaking, the wild

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fire-shine lighting up their faces, looking into each other's eyes. Did the fierce illumination which was revealing so much, show anything new to these two? Perhaps. The sweet, child-like eyes fell, and the colour mounted slowly into the pale olive cheeks. Gibbons' heart beat tumultuously; for one moment he had forgotten the awful danger in which they stood. There came a crash of breaking glass. The fierce heat had melted the lead which held the diamond panes in one of the old-fashioned windows on the ground floor, and sent them shivering to the ground. With a wild burst the flames rushed into the room. Gibbons dropped the girl's hands.

"Come, Mistress Leah, quick! There is no time to lose!" He turned hurriedly, and ran downstairs, beckoning her to follow; but on pushing aside the heavy cloth curtain which concealed the entrance of the shop, the lad stopped suddenly, let the curtain fall, and started back with a white, scared face. "May God help us, Mistress Leah! the shop is all on fire—we cannot pass there! Is there no way out at the back?"

"None. We use that part as a warehouse; the doors are all locked, and father has taken away the keys."

They stood facing each other, the young carver at the foot of the stairs, looking up; the girl three or four steps above him, her hand on the rail, her small foot poised in the act to descend, the white, awed look in his face reflecting itself on hers, motionless, speechless, while the fire roared and crackled behind them. One moment, then her features relaxed from their stony terror.

"There is a trap-door in the roof," she said, with the tremor of that awful moment still in her voice,

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"I forgot it before, but it opens to the back of the house; we might get out there."

Gibbons drew a deep breath. It was as though the hand of death had been taken from before his eyes, allowing him a glimmer of hope. He was himself again, brave, collected, ready for action.

"Quick, show me!"

With the words he sprang upstairs after the fast-flitting figure of the little Jewess. She disappeared through a long doorway at the head of a long flight of stairs, and Gibbons, following her, found himself, so soon as his eyes became accustomed to the almost total darkness, in a windowless attic immediately under the sloping roof of the tall old house.

Leah was already trying to force back the bolt which secured the trap-door she had spoken of; but the rusty iron, undisturbed for years in its socket, refused to move under her thin little fingers, and, with a gesture of despair, she drew back panting.

"It will not open, Master Gibbons, it will not open! O God! we shall be lost after all!"

Poor little thing! the strain was becoming too much for her. This last check almost broke down her remaining courage. The deep lustrous eyes filled with tears, her voice trembled, and she twisted her slender fingers nervously together. Poor little thing! Gibbons' heart swelled as he looked at her. No one to help her—no one but himself; his arm alone was between her and death. A new strength seemed to come upon the lad; all thought of self passed away—he had become a man, and he felt it.

"Courage, Mistress Leah!" he said, as cheerfully as he could, and at the same time a vigorous thrust from his strong hand sent the bolt flying back, and in another moment the trap was lying against the

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roof, and our hero's head was out through the opening, scanning the way by which they might descend. It was not promising; one glance told him so much. Below the opening a dozen feet of steeply-sloping roof, then a narrow gutter, and then—nothing but a sheer descent from top to bottom of the tall old house. not a ledge, not a buttress to afford foothold; even the highest window, belonging to that part of the building not occupied by the old Jew, was far below, quite out of reach. Gibbons drew his head in again, and, with an effort to hide the change which he knew must have come over his countenance, said:

"Mistress Leah, have you a rope at hand? We shall need one."

"A rope? O yes! I believe there are a dozen here."

And, groping her way towards the wall, the girl dragged out a small wooden box, and proceeded to undo the fastening.

Gibbons threw a glance round the garret in which they stood, and perceived, by the light which now streamed in through the open trap-door, that, like the shop below, it was choked with lumber, which, however, was here in the last stage of decay. Several other boxes like that over which Leah was stooping stood among the rubbish, iron-clamped, securely corded, filled with who knows what—old finery, perhaps—ancient knick-knacks collected by the cupidity of the old Jew, which, having never been able to sell, he had banished up there. Gibbons did not waste a thought on the subject; the contents were nothing to him—the cords which secured them everything. He turned again to the girl.

"Loose as many ropes as you can, Mistress Leah. I will return directly."

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Leah raised her face hastily towards him, with a look of painful entreaty.

"O Master Gibbons! you will not leave me, you will not——"

"Leave you, little one?" The young carver laid his hand kindly on the trembling shoulder of the kneeling girl, and the short, quiet tone of command in which he had before spoken, softened wonderfully. "May God help me if I could do that. I will but go to one of the front windows to let the men know where we are, and tell them to go round."

She turned again to her task, perfectly content, and Gibbons ran to the front of the house to execute his purpose. He opened a window in one of the front gables throwing at the same time an earthenware jar into the court below to attract the attention of the men. They looked up; but for a moment the lad could not speak. As he had expected, the opening of the window was the signal for an upward leap of the awaiting flames. His hair, his eyebrows, the very skin of his face, scorched already, seemed to shrivel up under their hot breath. The rising smoke choked him. With a desperate effort he freed his utterance.

"Go round—to the back! We are—escaping—by the roof!" he shouted, with a hoarse, choked voice, and closed the little window.

Had his words been heard? To the lad himself they had sounded strangely indistinct, ringing painfully in his ears, mingled with the roar and flutter of the flames. Had they been heard? His heart turned sick, his eyes swam, his very limbs were trembling from that face to face encounter with the fire. He *could* not do it over again. Oh! *had* his words been heard? Yes! a shout arose from below:

"We are coming!"

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Gibbons sprang from his perch, strengthened with new hope, and ran upstairs again. A coil of rope lay on the attic floor, and Leah was fastening the last knot. She held out the end without speaking, and Gibbons uncoiled it, proving knot after knot.

"No more ropes?"

"None."

"Then this must serve. The men are coming round; they will help you."

With hands which trembled in spite of himself, Gibbons secured one end of the rope to a beam on the roof, and then fastened the other end, with a tight knot, round the body of Leah, immediately under the arms. She then passed through the trap-door to the roof.

Leah grasped the rope, and without a word, and with wonderful self-possession, allowed herself to slide down the edge of the roof. This was the critical moment. But the peril was soon over. She glided over the edge, and the strong arms of Gibbons lowered her gradually but rapidly, and he won the shout of triumph of the men, who received her in their arms and set her free from the rope.

"All right, we have her. Come on, brave lad; don't lose time, for the old house won't last out much longer."

A crash was heard from below; one of the lower floors seemed to have fallen in. Gibbons knew his danger. In another minute the attached end of the rope might be burnt, and all chance of safety gone. He had already had some practice that night in descending by means of a rope. But the danger was infinitely greater here than at Newgate. There he had rest by descending from one window-sill to another; here the upper stories of the house projected over the

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lower, and there would be no rest for the foot until it touched the ground. But he was strong, active, and resolute and for the second time that day he descended from his perilous position, and stood safely on *terra firma*.

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CHAPTER XXIII

The Burning City

" Three hundred furnaces
Soon blazed through the wide city.

* * * * *

The noontide sun was darkened with that smoke,
The winds of eve dispersed those ashes grey."
Shelley—" The Revolt of Islam."

A dozen hands were stretched out to grasp the blackened, bleeding palm of the brave rescuer; but the leader of the party motioned them forwards.

" Not now," he said; " let us go at once, or we shall have the old house upon our heads." He led the way through the narrow passages, lanes, and alleys which wound, like those of a rabbit-warren, among the closely packed houses of the populous district, never pausing till he reached a wider and freer neighbourhood, to which the fire had not yet spread. Then he stopped and laid his hand on Gibbons' shoulder.

" That was bravely done, my lad," he said. " Here, take the twenty pieces, and five others to boot; you have well earned them." Gibbons drew back in indignant astonishment. " Pardon me, sir; what twenty pieces? I have done nothing to earn them."

" How now, fellow? " exclaimed one of the bystanders, stepping hastily forward. " Do you know that——"

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The gentleman interrupted him with a look and a motion of the hand.

"The twenty pieces which I offered for her rescue," he said, again addressing himself to Gibbons. "Did you not hear me say so?"

"No, an't please your honour."

"No? Oddsfish, gentlemen, here stands a braver man than any of you; he has done for naught what my gold pieces even could not bribe you to undertake. By my faith, gentlemen, he shames us all! Here, my hero, take the gold pieces as a slight token of our favour and admiration; I would it were more, but my pouch is well-nigh empty." But Gibbons still held back.

"Nay, sir, the maiden is known to me; I did not save her for gold, but for old acquaintance sake—and even if 'twere not so, who could have done otherwise?" A smile curled the other's high-bred mouth, his brown eyes twinkled.

"Well said, my cockerel, who could have done otherwise? Faith, 'twere pity the fire should scorch such a face as that. Here, pretty one, give him my poor pieces; he cannot refuse them at your hand. I would not it should be said of me I left such a gallant deed unrewarded." He poured the shining gold into Leah's little palm, and she held it out to Gibbons with one of her entreating glances and a timid—

"Pray take them, Master Gibbons; see, you hurt the good gentleman by refusing, and indeed you deserve something for the trouble I have given you."

"Your thanks were enough for that, Mistress Leah," returned Gibbons, still proudly; but he took the gold nevertheless, seeing no other way out of the difficulty.

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"There," said the gentleman with a smile, "that's settled, and may luck go with the gift. Now, pretty mistress, where must we escort you, for time presses?"

Leah's face changed, and tears came into her eyes.

"Alas! kind sir, I know not. My father went out early this morning to secure some monies which he had left with one of our brethren in Cheapside, bidding me mind the house in his absence, and he has never yet returned. Alas! kind sir, I know not where to go; I have no friends." The gentleman looked at her with a pitying glance.

"Poor child!" he said, "this is sad. Did your father appoint you no place to go to in case he should not return?"

"No, sir, none. He said he would be back soon, and I must not stir from the house till his return, that was how you found me there. Our lodgers all fled some hours ago, and would fain have had me go with them; but I waited, always thinking my father would return, till the flames were upon me, and it was too late. Ah, what can be keeping my father?"

The gentleman did not answer; he knew that Cheapside had been for some time in flames, and he feared what might be causing the delay. He turned to Gibbons.

"You said you knew this maiden; have you no friends with whom she might tarry at safe distance from the fire?"

"Sir, I have neither kith nor kin in the world, and as for my poor lodgings in Belle Sauvage Court, I fear me nothing remains of them by this time."

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"Belle Sauvage Court? Did you not tell me, Sir John, the flames had got that far some hours ago?" He turned to a man near.

"The court was blazing when I joined your ——" He stopped abruptly at a sign from the other.

"Ah!" said the gentleman again, in a meditative tone, and paused a moment as if undecided; then took the girl's hand and delivered her into the care of the gentleman who had last spoken, saying kindly, "Well, my pretty maiden, since you have no commands to lay upon us, as to the place where you would be escorted, you must allow this gentleman to lead you to my wife; she will give you safe asylum till we hear from your father. Farewell."

Scarcely had he spoken, when a horseman dashed up at full speed, dismounted, bowed low before the gentleman, and said, with breathless haste:

"Pardon, your Majesty, but Sir Thomas Bludworth sent me to say he could do nothing more. Ludgate and Cheapside are both in a blaze—the fire is pouring up the streets leading from the river—St. Paul's has already taken fire from the top. What must we do? His worship the Mayor entreats your Majesty's immediate presence." The King (for he it was who had led the party of workers) started, addressed one or two hurried words to his suite, and, leaping on the horse, galloped off in the direction of the cathedral, followed by all the party.

Gibbons alone remained, rooted to the spot, staring in blank astonishment after the disappearing horseman. So utterly confounded was he by the discovery he had just made, that he had never seen Mistress Leah's timidly offered hand, or heard her words of thanks and farewell; nor was it till he had been some

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minutes alone that he suddenly awoke to the fact. So it was the King—the King, of whose life of idle luxury he had heard so much—working like any labourer, keeping every one alive by his ready energy and resource. The King! And how had he behaved to his Majesty? Like any boor! Gibbons' heart smote him as he thought of his ungracious acceptance of the royal gift. He was vexed, thoroughly vexed with himself, nor did the thought of Leah mend the matter, for if report said true—and report spoke strongly enough—the English Court was at that time scarcely a safe asylum for a young and friendless girl. Yet even had he known where they were taking her, what could he have done—he, homeless, proscribed, an escaped prisoner? Bah! what had *he* to do with the matter? What was Mistress Leah to *him?* Gibbons bit his lips with vexation as he thought of it all; but those words "escaped prisoner," which he had mentally applied to himself, had the effect of turning his thoughts into another channel. He was not safe so long as he remained in London, and as he had now lost everything that he possessed, there was no longer anything to keep him there; he would therefore have his burns seen to, and leave the city as soon as possible.

Having come to this resolution, the lad (ten minutes ago the hero of the hour—now weary, dispirited and faint with pain) turned his steps towards the nearest apothecary's shop, which, however, was somewhat far to seek, as, like most of their fellow-citizens, gentle and simple, the men of medicine had fled at the approach of fire. After a long walk Gibbons found what he wanted, but his state of weariness was such that he was glad to accept the kindly apothecary's offer of food and rest for the remainder of the day, and it was

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not till towards evening that he himself felt able to proceed on his way.

The little shop where he had taken shelter was far removed from the neighbourhood of the fire, and the owner had little fear of its coming so far; but even at that distance the awful light overspreading the whole sky, deepening to blood-red where it hung over the heart of the city, showed with terrible distinctness in the gathering shades of evening. Gibbons longed to have a nearer view of it, and thinking that he could not be concealed better than in one of the villages down the Thames, where he could escape abroad in case of pursuit, he struck off towards the river, in the direction of St. James's, intending to take a boat at one of the stairs in the neighbourhood, where—the stream of fugitives not being so great—there would be more chance of obtaining one.

The streets, even in that untouched district, were alive with people: some flying, as in the morning, from the all-devouring enemy; some, with all their evil passions aroused by the universal terror and excitement, laughing, fighting, and carousing, careless of the fiery judgment which was amongst them. The uncounted barrels of wine, spirits, and strong ale, which their owners had hastily flung from the burning warehouses, and confided to the nearest bystanders to roll away out of reach of the fire, were the source of many of these disgraceful scenes. At almost every street-corner Gibbons passed one of these uproarious groups, surrounding some enormous tun, which they had broached on the spot, catching the liquor in their hands and mouths, or letting it escape in foaming streams down the dry kennels: men and women drinking, singing, and laughing together, as if it had been some great festival; while the trembling

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crowds of fugitives hurried past them, flying for their lives.

Here and there also he encountered eager knots of people, their excited faces lit up by the red glare of the fire, conversing eagerly on the all-absorbing topic. As he passed, he again and again caught the words: "Papists' work, comrades, take my word for it." "Much mistaken if the Dutch or French have not a hand in the matter."* "De Witt's doing, in revenge for our burning Vly," etc., etc., accompanied by curses deep and bitter on the supposed authors of the mischief.

Glad to escape from the excitement and crush of the streets, Gibbons turned into St. James's Park, with the intention of reaching the river at Westminster stairs. But here also all was life, though on a different grade to what he had just left.

Courtiers in silk and velvet promenaded the walks and alleys, with ladies, in evening costume, hanging on their arms—the whole Court, in fact, had turned out to see the fire at a comfortable and safe distance, finding entertainment in the new and terribly magnificent spectacle, instead of, as usual, going to the theatre.

Laugh and jest, little shrieks from the ladies, reassuring speeches from the gentlemen, filled the air, mingling with the distant roar and crackle of the flames; while the red glare, which made every corner of the city almost as light as day, cast grotesque shadows of strollers, trees, and bushes on the green turf at their feet.

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* The "Historical Narrative of the Fire," appended to De Foe's "History of the Plague," says this proposal was actually made to De Witt, but that he rejected it with horror.

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Quitting the park, Gibbons soon found himself standing on Westminster stairs, with the twin towers of the ancient cathedral rising above him, its dark masses touched by the crimson light from its blazing sister of Eastminster.* Was a like fate in store for the Abbey of the Kings? Gibbons looked up at the stately building and feared as much. He called a boat, and after some delay a wherry shot alongside.

"Where to, master?" asked the boatman, as he drew his craft up to the stairs with his long oar. Where? Gibbons had not an idea; yet he must answer quickly, or suspicion might be excited.

"To Deptford," he replied, naming the first place which came uppermost.

"Deptford? Then you must make it worth my while; I've plenty of work in London to-night without going so far to seek it." Gibbons held out a gold piece; the man's eye sparkled.

"Make it two, master, and I'll go."

"Done," said Gibbons, stepping into the wherry; and the boatman, without more ado, took his oars, and, pushing out into the stream, turned his boat's head down the river.

For some time they rowed in silence, Gibbons leaning back in the boat watching the brightening glare of the fire as they drew nearer and nearer, and the numerous craft with which the river was alive: some passing up the stream, some down, but almost all heavily laden with men, women, children, animals, household goods, &c., &c. Every stair along the water-side was crowded with people, with their goods and chattels piled up beside them, calling eagerly for

* St. Paul's.

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the boats, which were not numerous enough to convey them all.

Rounding the bend of the river, they shot past the Temple, and the whole glory of that marvellous fire-scene burst into view. Far as the eye could reach the city seemed one mass of flame, save for a broad band of blackened ruins tracing the water-side (where the fire had burnt itself out for want of fuel), thrown into sombre relief by the great warehouses, which, being full of oil, spirits, and other combustibles, continued to burn on in one entire body of variously-coloured flames—blue, crimson, golden-yellow, according to the nature of the contents.

Here and there by the water's edge a fiery scum of ignited oil floated slowly down the stream, setting fire to the furniture and goods which the despairing owners had flung into the water; and over all fell a fast-dropping shower of fiery flakes and dull grey ashes, sowing the seeds of fire in every direction.

After rounding the bend of the river, the boatman paused, steadied his craft by the side of a barge anchored in mid-stream, and pointed in the direction of St. Paul's.

"See there, master," he said; "there's a bonfire for you!" Gibbons looked, and saw a fearful sight indeed. Beyond the blackened ruins of what had once been Thames Street rose the glorious old pile—tower, pinnacles, projections, and recesses, thrown into strong contrast of light and shadow by the consuming fire—standing out in awful beauty against the night sky; while from time to time the massy stones of which it was built burst from the walls under the pressure of intolerable heat, hurling themselves among the houses around with a thunder, as of great guns. The boatman moved his finger and

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pointed to a building beyond, rising like a golden palace from out the smoke, burning without flame; every line unaltered in shape, yet glorified as though by enchantment into an intense golden-red glow.

"That's Guildhall," said the boatman, "and well gilded it is at present, to my thinking; why, master, it's the finest sight to-night in London. Nothing like solid oak timber for resisting the flames."

As he spoke, a cataract of sparks shot upward from the neighbourhood of the Tower, followed by a report which made the air ring again. The boatman started, making the dark water under his wherry's bows break into a thousand shining ripples as they rushed into the light, beneath the swaying craft.

"Hallo!" said the man, steadying himself again, "they're doing it at last with a vengeance! Well, better late than never."

"What?" asked Gibbons.

"Why, blowing up the houses with gunpowder. I thought his Majesty would see the wisdom of it at length; he would have lost the Tower else, and may still, for the fire's precious near. Look you here, master, the greater part of the city might have been saved, if those in authority would have heard reason at first. Soon after the fire broke out some of the sailors were for blowing up the houses before it with powder, so as to put a stop to the spread. But not at all; a set of rich aldermen and merchants, whose houses would have had to go first, set their faces so vehemently against the plan that the public good, forsooth, was sacrificed to their greedy obstinacy. Much good it did them; their houses were burnt after all, and served them right too! 'Pon my word, master, it makes me mad to think how this business has been mismanaged from the very first. People may

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talk of its being the work of the Papists, the Dutch, and so forth; but if it be, our own folk have furthered the plot to the best of their power by their pig-headed stupidity. First of all, the Thames water-tower is out of order, and no water can be got for the street pipes; then they try the New River pipes, with no better success—gallop off to Islington and find the water works locked up, and the keys carried off by the officer—break open the doors, and behold, all the cocks have been turned off!* There, master, there's nice arrangements for you! And even *then* folks don't try to check the fire, by all means left in their power. No, it's *sure* to stop here; it's certain to go out there; and when it doesn't, hark to the hullibuloo! No, no, the Papists may be at the bottom of it, but they would never have succeeded if the Londoners had had an ounce of brains amongst them. We manage things better than this where *I* come from."

"And where's that, friend?" asked Gibbons, who had listened to the waterman's talk with considerable interest, though he had avoided questioning, lest his ignorance concerning the outbreak of the fire might excite suspicion.

"Canny Newcassel," (Newcastle) answered the man, with a grin, which made his white teeth shine in the firelight. "But I left it when I was a bit laddie, more's the pity."

And with these words the boatman pushed off his wherry from the barge-side, dipped his oars into the water, breaking the reflection of the crimson sky, and sending a whole Chinese puzzle of rings within rings, swirling from dark to light over the surface, and

* "Historical Narrative of the Fire."

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bending all his strength to his task, spoke no more till he had landed his passenger at Deptford, where, having recommended him to an inn patronised by watermen, he set off on his return trip up the river, richer by two gold pieces than he had come.

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CHAPTER XXIV

The Face in the River

"The shade
Of his bright image floated on the river
Of liquid light."
SHELLEY—"Revolt of Islam."

"I had a dear friend once, but he is dead!
And of all those on the wide earth who breathe
Thou dost resemble him alone."
Ibid.

It was the next evening—a golden, glowing evening of early September. Yellow and crimson were beginning to gleam here and there among the rich green foliage which bordered the River Thames, flowing broad, calm, and placid under the glow of the setting sun, every tree, every cloud reflected in all its vivid colouring on the smooth glassy surface. Far in the distance a dense cowl of smoke hung suspended in the still air, showing the position of the burning city; and a livid light, not of the setting sun, tainted the pure blue sky overhead.

Gibbons stood by the riverside, leaning listlessly against a post used by the watermen for mooring their boats, watching the ceaseless flow of the water and the constant passing of the many crafts of all sizes, shapes, and nations, which dropped lazily down the stream, with every sail set to catch the scarcely breathing wind, which, having done its work in burning half London, had suddenly dropped, as though in awe at the ruin it had accomplished. Very sad was the attitude of the young figure, very hopeless the

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still boyish face reflected in the water below! Life seemed setting dead against him; do what he would it seemed impossible to resist the strong current of adverse circumstances which, up to this moment, had driven him back whenever he seemed to be advancing one step on the path which, in spite of all, he could not help feeling he was born to tread.

Never had he felt more utterly despondent than now, when the little foundations round which he had begun to build were again swept away, more utterly than ever, by the strong wave of misfortune. Perhaps few had suffered more cruelly by that terrible fire than this lad who had so little to lose—so little, and yet so much.

But after all, perhaps some one will say, what was it? Only a tattered old picture, which had served as a window-shutter, a half-finished piece of carving, and a set of shabby tools, which the least skilful workman in our days would not think of touching. Yes, this was all, and yet it was enough to break the carver's heart. For those scanty materials represented a cherished castle in the air, the mental sight of which had cheered its builder through many a dark day; they were but the germ of a fair flower, which he had confidently hoped would bloom *sometime*, even though he should wait many a day to see it. And now it was all over, the seed had perished, the flower could never bloom—never, never more; for with the old cartoon Gibbons had lost his idea.

In vain did he seek, looking dreamily into the water to trace that once so vivid picture. He had thought he could *never* forget it; and yet now, when it was impossible to refresh his memory, line after line seemed to grow dim and uncertain. The attitude of a figure, the position of a head, nay, even the

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Divine expression of that wonderful Face, which had haunted him for months—on his sick-bed, in his prison, nay, during his very dreams—was fading away; he *could* not catch the fleeting vision, and he should never know how it really was,—never, never more. So mused the artist in his despondency, unshed tears dimming the picture which he was striving to trace in the water, and the torturing thought arose that it *might* have been saved, perhaps—if—— Yet no, what was he thinking of? Sweet Mistress Leah, with her fair child-face and pleading eyes—thank God that he had been able to rescue her from an awful death! In *that* thought at least he could have unmixed content—deep, pure, unselfish joy. No, not the shadow of a regret should touch that memory. And yet the lad sighed—sadly, wearily; so true is it that the human heart can find perfect rest in no earthly thought for more than a passing moment.

With the thought of a friend arose the craving for sympathy, the feeling of utter loneliness, the longing for some one to speak to. "Oh, if Silvio had not died! If I only had him again—were it but for an hour. O Silvio, Silvio!" The lad's lips trembled as he murmured the long silent name, and the tears welled over, and dropped slowly into the river.

Hark, what was that? Gibbons raised his head and listened intently. Faint, in the distance, stealing softly over the water, came the sound of a violin:

"Italia, Italia!
Sweet home across the sea," etc.

Silvio's favourite air! The little national song he had learnt among his native mountains, and always used to play when the aching longing of home-sickness came too strongly upon him for silence.

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The lad's heart beat to suffocation, the blood throbbed in his head, so that he could scarcely hear. He put his hand to his forehead, and a cry arose to his quivering lips, a cry not to be suppressed—"O Silvio, Silvio!" For one moment he felt as though his wish were about to be granted; one moment of strained, trembling expectation, and then the violin notes suddenly ceased, the light died from Gibbons' face, he drooped his eyes once more to the gliding water, with a feeling of bitter disappointment.

So he had been dreaming again! Yes, that was all. And yet *why* would these echoes always haunt him? Why should he be tortured by sounds awaking expectations which could never be realised? Without trying to answer this unanswerable question, the lad fell again into the same sad reverie from which the dream-music had awakened him; watching, without marking, the vivid pictures which the sunset was painting on the water at his feet.

Presently—how or when he could not tell—his inattentive eye became fixed and fascinated. A shadowy face seemed to look up from the river depths, among the white and crimson of the sunset clouds, like the angel-faces in some old picture peeping from the skies—a face, and nothing more. A dark olive face, a pair of soft black eyes, a broad brow, crowned as with a golden halo by the sinking sun; a face he knew—oh, so well!

Again that throbbing, suffocating sensation; again that feeling of something at hand, which his reason told him could not be. But this time he did not look up; he dared not take his eyes from the pictured face, lest the spell should be broken, and it should vanish again.

A minute thus. Then a tender, quivering smile

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broke over the face in the water; the eyes seemed to look up into his, oh, so lovingly! Gibbons could bear it no longer. A sob broke from his heaving chest, and he covered his face. A hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice thrilled him through and through.

"*Caro, signor,* don't you know me? Have you forgotten Silvio?"

The lad started back, his hands dropped from his face, and there before his terrified eyes was the face which had looked from the river; no more a mere reflection, but a face, a form, real and substantial—the very Silvio of long ago.

Gibbons shuddered and turned cold. He had heard of spirits returning from the other world; did he see one now? He could not speak, his breath came in short, quick pants, and his eyes, wide-open and terrified, remained fixed on the figure before him. A spirit, and yet it looked so real! The bright, eager expression faded from the dark face.

"Then you have forgotten me, signor? You remember no more poor Silvio? Ah, signor, *I* did not forget so soon!"

Gibbons struggled to speak.

"But Silvio is dead! Oh! why do you look so like him? I——"

The face lighted up again with eager brightness; the figure sprang forward with outstretched hands.

"Ah, then, that is it! No, signor, I did not die; the good God had mercy on me. *O amico mio! caro*——" The voice broke, and in a moment the passionate Italian was sobbing for joy on his friend's neck.

Joseph and Benjamin, David and Jonathan. Well, I suppose such meetings and such partings are the

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same all the world over. The difference of character and nationality is but the outside crust; once let this be broken through by the irresistible upheaval of the hidden waters of the life within, and deep will answer to deep; for, as Shakespeare truly says, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

The first joy of that meeting over, there was much to tell of the year which had parted those two lives, during much of which both had believed the other dead. First Silvio insisted on hearing how his friend had fared after he had left him on that memorable night; and on Gibbons telling him that his escape from the house had occasioned an inquiry, resulting in the dismissal of the watchman and the appointment of others, together with a nurse, upon which the quality of the food had immediately changed for the better—plainly showing the dishonesty of the former men—Silvio exclaimed, with eager joy:

"Then I did save you, after all! O *caro*, I am so glad! If you only knew how bitter the thought was that I had done my utmost, and *yet* could not help you! I could have died happy, quite happy, *amico mio*, had I known that my life was given for yours!"

Gibbons pressed the brown hand hard which rested on his arm, and turned away his face; the Italian's devoted love touched him too deeply for words. Presently he asked:

"But, Silvio, lad, you have not told me what became of you? O lad, lad, I have thought you dead this long while. I looked for you through all the city, till at last"—(he paused a moment, and his voice shook)—"I fancied that I had found you in Aldgate Churchyard. O Silvio, lad! he was very like you; in the dress you wear; and there was a dead monkey

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in his arms. After that I looked no more, I could——" He stopped suddenly, for his voice was choked.

"A Savoyard? Ah, poor fellow! I wonder if he longed for the blue mountains when he was dying, as I did. But it was not I, *caro*, nor Filippo; thanks to the good God, we are both alive and well. Oh, but it was an awful time!"

Then Silvio told of that terrible night, and how he had been found fainting on the door-step by little Master Guildford, the apothecary, who had carried him to a pest-house, paid for his entrance, and confided him to the care of a nurse and doctor, through whose attention he had struggled back to life, after weeks of almost hopeless suffering. How he had been sent down to Deptford for change of air, at the expense of the kindly little apothecary, who had taken an especial fancy to him, and who, after he was well enough, had procured him a post in the orchestra of one of the small riverside theatres, where he was earning enough to provide him with food and lodging.

"And why did you never come to see me, Silvio?" asked Gibbons suddenly, as his friend stopped speaking.

The Italian's face changed.

"Because," he began, speaking nervously, "at first I heard you were dead, and I could not bear to come near the house where we had been so happy together. And then—and then—when at last after many months, I heard news of you, I—O Signor Gibbons! you know I was always a burden to you, and I thought perhaps—but no matter. And then there were Mistress Leah's clasps. I cannot tell what became of them; some one must have taken them from me in the street as I lay, for when I recovered they were gone, and no one knew anything of them. And—and—when she first gave them to me to buy

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you food the signorina looked as though she hardly trusted me; and so, when they were lost, I feared—O signor, I did not know *what* you and she might think! But indeed, indeed——"

Gibbons put both hands on the boy's shoulders, and looked him full in the face.

"Silvio, lad, is *that* all you know about me? I thought we were friends. Ah, Silvio! you do not know how I missed you all the time; and it might have been ended so much sooner if—ah, well! I suppose but for the chance of this evening we should never have met."

"No, signor, no; I was wrong, very wrong, but it was not so bad as that. But see, it is getting dark; come with me to my cottage, and I will tell you as we go. It was not easy that staying away, *caro*, do not fancy it. I longed, ah, how I longed to see you! but I feared. At last came the fire; and I thought you might need help. I would put off no longer, for now at last, I thought, I may be of some use. So I came, but you were not there; only I saw that the house would soon be on fire, and I might at least save your things. I could find no carving; nothing but the instruments and——"

They had reached the cottage, and as Silvio spoke he took up a lighted lamp, held it up to the wall, and showed to Gibbons' delighted eyes his lost treasure, the old cartoon.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE SUN LOOKS IN AT THE WINDOW, AND FORTUNE COMES IN BY THE DOOR

"The sun has risen with comfort in his face,
The smile of heaven, to warm thy frozen heart
And bless with saintly hand. What! is it long
To wait and far to go? Thou shalt not go;
Behold, across the snow to thee He comes;
Thy heaven descends, and is it long to wait?
Thou shalt not wait."

JEAN INGELOW—"Brothers and a Sermon."

FOUR years had passed since the fire of London, during which Gibbons lived quietly in the little cottage at Deptford, where he had taken lodgings with Silvio's old landlady. They were very happy years for the two lads, each pursuing his own calling in undisturbed tranquillity; Silvio carrying out Signor Nicolao's advice, and practising diligently when he was not required at the theatre; Gibbons getting what employment he could, and working between whiles at his carved copy of Tintoretto's cartoon, which grew daily towards perfection.

It is an afternoon in January, 1671, when we again take up the thread of our story. Silvio is absent, practising with the orchestra, and Gibbons is sitting at work close to the window of the cottage room, bending over his carving, and profiting by the fast-fleeting daylight of the short winter's afternoon. Before him on a rough easel is the carved cartoon all but completed, and above it, on the wall, hangs the old engraving which has called the beautiful

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carving into being. Gibbons is busy with a delicate instrument, giving the finishing strokes to the central figure, every now and then glancing up at the copy, and developing with minute touches the wonderful expression of the Divine Countenance. Presently, as the sun stoops nearer to the horizon, bathing the carver's figure in light, a crimson ray of wintry sunshine streams in at the window and falls full upon the bowed head of the Christ, bringing out, with its quickening touch, the look of mingled tenderness and suffering, and resting like an unearthly smile on the dying face.

Yes, it is very like, very. The same features, the same expression, reflected as it were from the print above to the carving beneath, only with added beauty, added reality; for the high relief, the bright lights and deep shadows, give the wooden copy an advantage over the flat surface of its exemplar. Very beautiful it is, in truth. Gibbons' heart thrills with pleasure as he pauses a moment to watch the effect of the sunlight on his handiwork. Not only the central Crucifix, but the two thieves—one with the look of coming light, the other with that of coming darkness, on their world-worn faces; the tender sorrow of the holy women; the various expressions of hate, passion, and indifference displayed by the Jews and Romans; the spirited attitudes of all the hundred figures of men, horses, etc.; each was executed with a care, a finish, a delicacy of touch, as if it alone had been the principal object of the artist's attention. And then the frame which surrounded this gem of workmanship. All the dreams in which Gibbons and Silvio had indulged in the little attic of Belle Sauvage Court seemed to have taken form in these wonders of luxuriant leafiness, wreathing themselves in and out in all the grace of

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perfect nature. All were there—vine-leaves, tendrils, and grapes, stately lilies, fruit laden pomegranates, trailing sprays of wild roses and brambles, ears of corn of every kind, from the upright spikes of the bearded barley to the loose tresses of the trembling oats, all "chained together with the free disorder natural to each species;"* while, crowning all, right above the head of the centre Figure, was the thorny garland, encircling a cross-bill, so soft and downy that it seemed made of feathers, which, with eager bill, was straining all its tiny power at a stubborn nail.

No wonder Gibbons felt a glow of pleasure as he looked at his beautiful work; no wonder, as he laboured patiently on, the dreams of what this might lead to grew brighter and more real. Yet the spirit of that dream was changed. The thought of personal fame no longer held the prominent, all-absorbing part it had once done. Frequent disappointment, frequent checks, and, perhaps still more, the uneventful quiet of the last four years, had done much to subdue the too eager spirit of the young carver; and though none the less steadfast in pressing forward towards the aim of perfection, the aim had taken the higher form of a strong desire to seek the glory of God rather than his own advancement, in fulfilling to the utmost of his power the work "to which it had pleased God to call him," rejoicing in that work, and waiting patiently for the blessing which seldom fails those who "so strive."

A point requiring alteration struck Gibbons' eye as he gazed at his carving, and again he bent over the picture with absorbed attention. So intent was he in the critical alteration of some scarcely perceptible

* Walpole.

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fault of expression in a soldier's countenance, that he never observed the sudden cutting off of the wintry sunbeam, caused by the appearance of a face at the window. It was not a common face by any means, though it *was* doing the somewhat unmannerly thing of peeping in at the window. On the contrary, it was a highly refined and intellectual countenance, bearing an unmistakable stamp of "gentleman" on every feature, and a gentleman well-born and well-bred too, in spite of present appearances.

It would have been a curious sight (had any one been there to see it) to observe the change of expression in the stranger's face. At first there was simple curiosity to discover what the inhabitant of the lonely cottage could have found to occupy him so intently; then came surprise, rising, as he gazed at the unconscious carver, to astonishment, wonder, and delighted admiration. Full five minutes the face remained at the window; then the crimson sunlight suddenly streamed in again; there was the sound of a footstep crunching over the snow-covered ground outside, and then came a knock at the door. Gibbons rose from his work, and, on opening, found a richly but soberly dressed man of about fifty years of age standing without, whom it instantly flashed across his memory he had seen at St. Paul's, in company with Dr. Wren and the other architects and dignitaries, the very day he was put into prison.

"May I come in?" asked the stranger, courteously. "I was unmannerly enough to look in at the window as I was passing just now, and saw you about some work, which I would fain examine more closely."

"Certainly, sir," answered Gibbons, leading the stranger up to his easel. "But it is not quite finished yet; your honour must excuse the roughness."

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"Roughness!" exclaimed the gentleman, as he bent over the carving, and not another word did he say for many minutes afterwards. Gibbons watched his movements with some anxiety, as he moved backwards and forwards, now looking closely at the picture, now stepping back and holding up his hand to shade the light, trying the effect from a distance. At last he came to a stand immediately opposite the carving, and remained gazing fixedly at it, with his hands clasped behind his back. "Beautiful!" he exclaimed presently. "Tintoretto's, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, so I am told."

"And you did this all yourself—without help?"

"I did, sir."

"Ah!" Again a few minutes' silence. Then the stranger turned an enthusiastic face towards the carver. "I have travelled much," he said, "I have been to foreign lands, and seen many beautiful things, but in all my wanderings I never saw any carving equal to this. It is beautiful—exquisite! I have seen the original painting at Venice, and can assure you that you have reproduced it to the life."

Gibbons coloured with pleasure.

"I am but a beginner, sir," he said, modestly; "I hope to do something better in time."

"Better? well, that's as it may be. As for being a *beginner*, I can only repeat that I never saw such work as this. Why do you live in this out-of-the-way place, young man? You might make your fortune in London with such a talent as yours."

"Ah, sir, I don't know about that; I lived in London once, and I was worse off than I am here, where at least I can work in quiet without interruption. An unknown man like me cannot hope for much. I wonder you found me out, sir," he added, with a smile. "I have

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worked here for many a long day without any one coming near me, except my friend who shares the cottage with me."

"Well," answered the stranger, smiling too, "I expect you must say good-bye to your retirement. I can't allow such a workman as you to remain any longer in the shade, 'hiding your light under a bushel.' Would you not like to be introduced to some great man, my friend?"

"Well, sir, since you are so kind, I should not be sorry to sell this piece, if you could find me a purchaser."

"I have no doubt I can; I will name you to his Majesty next time I go to Court. By the by, what is your name, my friend?"

"Grinling Gibbons, an it please your honour."

"*Grinling?* Dutch, eh?"

"No, sir, *English*," returned the carver, with emphasis. "But I believe I have some kin in the Low Countries."

"Ah, I see," answered the gentleman, with a smile. "Well, Mr. Gibbons, what will you take for that piece of yours?" The carver hesitated.

"It has taken much time and labour: should your honour think £100 too large a price to put upon it?"

"£100? In good earnest the very frame is worth that money; but perhaps you are right not to ask too much at first. I have no doubt the piece will soon be off your hands, and be thought a bargain too."

"Your honour is very good. Ah, sir, I cannot say how grateful I should be if you would use your influence for me."

"Nay, my friend, I am only too glad to advance such talent as yours. I have a great liking for artists and their work; and for the rest, I suspect it will not

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need much influence from John Evelyn to set you afloat."

"*Mr. Evelyn!*" exclaimed Gibbons, with a start. "This *is* an honour. Indeed, sir, I should have been ashamed to have shown my unfinished work to so good a judge, had I known——"

"Ah, then, it is well you did *not* know, Mr. Gibbons," returned Evelyn, laughing. "But in good sooth you need not be ashamed to show it to anybody, even in its present state, least of all to *me*. But see, it is getting quite late; I must not stay chatting any longer, or my good lady will not know what has became of me. We must have you up at Sayes Court, Mr. Gibbons; I have a fine copy of this picture there, which you will doubtless like to see. Stay—did you not say you had a friend living with you? Is he, too, a carver?"

"He is a violinist, sir," answered Gibbons, eagerly. "An Italian musician; and he plays—oh, so beautifully; *such* music, sir!"

"Ah, I must hear him, then; I love music. And *you*, do you play also? I saw a violin by your side when you were carving."

"A little, sir, but *he* taught me. Ah, sir! I shall never play like Silvio; his is *true* genius."

"Then I have found *two* diamonds instead of one," answered Evelyn, with a kindly smile; "I must see what I can do for both of you. Farewell, my young friend; make haste to finish your work. You shall hear from me soon."

He turned and left the cottage, and Gibbons stood for a moment just where he had left him, utterly transfixed with joy. Then he fell on his knees before his beautiful carving of the Crucifixion, and, bowing his head on his clasped hands, the artist's whole soul went up in silent thanksgiving.

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"Ah, *amico mio!* what has happened?" asked Silvio, looking into his friend's shining eyes, when, on his return that evening, Gibbons went to open the door for him.

"What *should* have happened, Silvio, lad?" returned Gibbons, the light overflowing from his eyes, and rippling all over his expressive countenance.

"What? Ah, *something* has, something *good*; I see it in your face, *caro*. Tell me?" And Silvio put both hands on his friend's arm and looked up with his own irresistible smile.

Gibbons told him. The Italian's dark eyes glistened.

"Then it has come at last? Ah, *carissimo*, I am glad, glad. *This* time you will have good fortune; I know it."

"If God will, Silvio, lad," answered the carver softly.

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CHAPTER XXVI

How Cartoon and Carver Fared at Court

"*K. Edw.*—Thus far our fortune keeps an upward course
And we are graced with wreaths of victory.
But in the midst of this bright-shining day
I spy a black, suspicious, threatening cloud,
That will encounter with our glorious sun
Ere he attain his easeful western bed.

"*Clar.*—A little gale will soon disperse that cloud,
And blow it to the source from whence it came;
The very beams will dry these vapours up,
For every cloud engenders not a storm."

SHAKESPEARE—"Henry VI., Part III."

In truth, as Mr. Evelyn said, Gibbons had now to say good-bye to his retirement. Since the first visit of the master of Sayes Court few days passed without his coming, either alone or with a party of friends, to inspect the progress on the carving. Among others, Dr. Wren looked in one evening, after dining with Evelyn; and his warm admiration of the cartoon pleased the young carver more than that of any one else.

At last came that crowning distinction, a summons to Court, both for carver and cartoon. What a moment of excitement it was when the great picture, being at length completely finished, was carried out of the cottage and placed in the cart which was to take it to Whitehall! And what a business the packing was! Such arranging and re-arranging, such stuffing and padding of straw here and hay there, that no single flower of the delicate framework might come to grief during the transit. Mr. Evelyn superintended

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in person, ordering, advising, and giving the benefit of his experience in packing works of art with as much interest and a great deal more bustle than his *protégé* himself, who stood looking on, dressed in his best, with his blue eyes shining and a crimson spot of excited anxiety on either cheek; for was not this day to see the making or marring of his prospects for life? At length all was ready, and the party got under way: Silvio standing at the cottage door to see them off, waving his hand and showering good wishes, in a mingled torrent of Italian and English, on every member of the party, from Gibbons and the cartoon down to the very cart and horse which carried it.

As for the carver himself, he sat opposite Mr. Evelyn in his coach, with his eyes fixed on the passing landscape, hardly uttering a word all the way to London, and paying but slight attention to the instructions which that gentleman was giving him as to how he was to behave himself in the presence of royalty. Truth to say, Gibbons was rather uneasy about the coming interview, for he had an unpleasant remembrance of a time when he had by no means acted up to these punctilious maxims of Court etiquette; and he feared lest the King might remember the little incident also, and return his lack of courtesy by an unfavourable reception of his cherished child, the carved cartoon. With these anxious thoughts mingled the intrusive memory of Mistress Leah's wistful little face, which, called up in connection with the occasion of his meeting with the King, *would* keep dancing before his mind's eye in the most provoking manner, so that you may easily imagine our friend Gibbons was in no fit state of mind to profit by Mr. Evelyn's well-meant instructions. Nor was his composure increased when, the carriage having stopped before one of the side entrances

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of the palace, he and his patron, accompanied by two strong porters bearing the carved cartoon, were marshalled by a dignified-looking usher up stately staircases, along wide echoing corridors, and through spacious suites of rooms furnished with a magnificence which quite took away the artist's breath.

Such gilding and painting, such gorgeous tapestry and satin-covered chairs and couches, such soft, bright carpets, on which it seemed almost a sin to tread!

These alone were enough to dazzle unaccustomed eyes; but when it came to the pictures—the radiant beauties of Vandyke and Sir Peter Lely, in all the freshness of their charms; the smiling cherubs, with wonderful garlands twined round their chubby limbs, which coquetted, languished, and sported on every wall and ceiling—Gibbons' head was quite turned. Now he would fain have lingered to admire, in a transport of artistic pleasure; now he almost turned away his face from the sight of so much beauty, fearing, with a sad sinking of the heart, that the owner of all this magnificence would scarcely care to look at his poor work.

Presently in one of the passages they encountered a handsome, courtly-looking gentleman, with whom Mr. Evelyn exchanged some words in a low voice. The gentleman looked curiously at Gibbons.

"So this is your *protégé?*" he asked. "Ah, well, young man, I must see this masterpiece, which has so taken my son-in-law's fancy, another day; I have no time now. *Au revoir!*" He smiled, nodded, and passed on.

Evelyn motioned to the porters to proceed.

"Carry the picture to Sir Richard Browne's chamber," he said; then turning to Gibbons—"I must

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leave you with it there while I learn his Majesty's pleasure; he will probably send for you soon."

So saying, he turned up a back stair and entered a comfortably furnished room, into which the March sun was shining pleasantly, almost extinguishing the wood fire which burnt on the hearth. Here the porters carefully deposited their burden, which the kind-hearted Evelyn spent several minutes in arranging in the best light, lest any one should come to look at it. Then, after bidding the porters wait in the ante-room, he nodded encouragingly to Gibbons, and left him to his own reflections.

These were of the most broken and unconnected nature. First, they related to his work, round which he hovered uneasily, changing and re-changing its position, and wondering anxiously what effect it would have on a stranger's eyes. Then, as the minutes passed and no one came, he tried to while away the time by examining the contents of the room, gazing admiringly at the few choice pictures, and reading the titles of the books which adorned the well-filled shelves; on several he saw the name of John Evelyn, and his respect and admiration for his patron increased tenfold.

After this he looked out of the window, and was admiring a group of ladies and gentlemen who were just returning from a ride—feathers waving, spurs jingling, and horses curvetting—when the sound of an opening door suddenly brought his heart into his mouth, and looking round he beheld Mr. Evelyn, accompanied by a gentleman who, though richly and daintily dressed, he instantly recognised as the same royal personage whom he had seen, all smoked and grimy, on the day of the fire. With more presence of mind than Mr. Evelyn had expected, the young

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artist bent his knee and kissed the hand which Charles extended to him, though the rushing blood which dyed both face and brow showed how much startled he was by this unexpected entrance.

"Ah! so this is your young prodigy, Evelyn?" said the King, scanning the artist's face and figure. "Methinks I have seen him before, eh, young man? Where was it? my memory plays me false." Gibbons coloured deeper than before. Alas! the King *had* remembered.

"Indeed, your Majesty," he answered, nervously, "I have long wished to ask your pardon for that day, but I was flurried by the fire, and I did not expect——"

"Oddsfish, so it is!" exclaimed the King, interrupting him with a laugh. "So this is the young spark who all but threw our gold pieces in our royal face! Know you that we might have arrested you for high treason, young man?" Gibbons' countenance fell; this did not seem to augur well for the carved cartoon.

"Your Majesty will be pleased to remember that you were *incognito*. I——"

"Ah, yes, his Majesty *does* remember it; aye, and something else too—he remembers one of the bravest deeds it has ever been his fortune to behold. You did not know your diamond had another face besides the artist one, eh, Evelyn?" returned the King, with all the Stuart grace of manner. "Ah, well, I must tell you that story another time. And so you are a carver too, my fine fellow?" he continued, turning again to Gibbons. "Let us see this work of yours; our good Evelyn tells us it is well worth our notice, and he is an excellent judge in these matters."

Evelyn led the King up to the carved cartoon, which he explained in the clear, lucid style peculiar

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ROYAL FAVOUR.

p. 279.

The Carved Cartoon.

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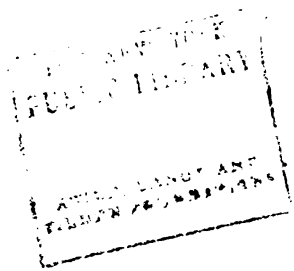
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to him, pointing out all its beauties and excellences with the air of a connoisseur and the eager interest of one personally concerned in the matter.

The King listened attentively, with his eyes fixed on the carving, a more serious look than usual creeping over his good-humoured face as he gazed on the solemn beauty which the artist's skilful hand had called forth from the hard wood.

"You were right, Evelyn," he said, as the latter ceased speaking; "this is well worth seeing. You have a ready hand, young man, and a pretty fancy too. Aye, 'tis marvellously beautiful," he went on, meditatively; "by my faith it is. One might say the whole scene had been transformed into wood, just as it was. And those flowers and leaves—— Certes, my man, you can do more than I can, king as I am. *I* could not make them grow like that with a mere touch of the hand. Come, Evelyn, we must show this to the Queen; 'twill just do for her private chapel. I warrant me she will be marvellously well pleased with it. Have it carried to her bed-chamber, and bring the lad too. I will go and advertise her of its coming." He left the room, and Evelyn turned to Gibbons with a beaming face.

"It takes," he said, blithely, "it takes, and excellent well too. I have seldom seen his Majesty so pleased with anything of the kind. Depend upon it, her Majesty will buy it, and at a good price too; being a Crucifixion, it is just the thing for her. Don't ask too modest a sum, Master Gibbons: 'tis good work, and worth a good price; since his Majesty admires it, we are pretty safe with the Queen. Come along." He called in the porters, and the whole party moved off to the Queen's apartments.

Her Majesty's bed-chamber was already well filled

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when the carver and cartoon arrived there. Evidently this latter exhibition had interrupted another, previously in progress, for the splendid furniture of the spacious apartment was covered with an equally splendid array of dresses, mantles, French jewellery, and headgear of various sorts, presided over by the very same little Frenchwoman whom you will remember, as Gibbons did, in conjunction with certain rather questionable dealings respecting a so-called ebony necklace. Around her, at the lower end of the apartment, were gathered a whole bevy of maids of honour and ladies-in-waiting, gazing admiringly at the finery, and discussing in low voices the present fashions, at a respectful distance from the King and Queen, who were conversing together in a window-recess. They turned round as the party entered, and Gibbons saw a trim-figured, stately little personage, with pale olive complexion, and a timid, wistful expression in the soft Spanish eyes, which kept watching every change of her husband's countenance, almost like those of the little spaniel which lay coiled up at his feet.

Charles came forward almost eagerly, presented Gibbons to the Queen, and, beckoning to a gentleman-in-waiting who stood at the door, bid him assist Evelyn to place the cartoon in the best light. "There, now, Catherine, come and look at it; is it not beautiful?" The liquid eyes were turned to the carving, and then up to Charles' face as though to read his opinion, then she spoke, with a touch of the Portuguese accent still lingering on her tongue—

"Ah, yes, it is beautiful."

"The best piece of work of the kind I have ever seen," continued the King; "and Evelyn tells me he has never met with its like, even abroad. See,

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Catherine, that little bird at the top; would you not say it lived?"

The Court ladies gathered round as the King spoke, endeavouring, at a respectful distance, to get a sight of the new exhibition; while in the background stood the neglected Frenchwoman, a malignant expression resting like a cloud on her sharp features, as she tapped her foot noiselessly on the soft carpet, and muttered inaudibly to herself.

"Just the thing for your private chapel," continued Charles; "'twould make a superb altar-piece. Methinks I heard you say the other day you wanted one."

"Ah, yes," murmured the Queen, "if your Majesty——" she was interrupted by a hasty summons at the door; a gentleman-in-waiting entered, and stepped up to the King.

"Your Majesty will pardon me, but a courier has just arrived from his Majesty the King of France; the business is pressing, and he requests an immediate audience with your Majesty."

"Certainly," answered the King. "I will come at once. What news from our brother of France, I wonder? There, Evelyn, I must leave you for the present; her Majesty must take my place as a patron of art, eh, Catherine? Adieu, Master Gibbons: we shall be better acquainted ere long, I hope."

No sooner was the King gone than the Frenchwoman joined the group gathered around the cartoon, placing herself close behind the Queen. Catherine turned round.

"Well, my good Madame de Boord, what think you of this fine work? 'Tis very beautifully done, is it not?"

"*Ah, oui!* your Majesty," replied the French-

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woman, coming forward, with a brightening face, "it is indeed something of very beautiful, as your Majesty says; but if your gracious Majesty will pardon my giving an opinion, it appears to me—but no, I will not presume to say my opinion of what your Majesty admires so fully."

The Queen smiled.

"Come, madame, be not too modest; artists are always glad of every one's opinion. Are they not, Sir George?" she added, turning to the gentleman who had assisted in placing the cartoon, and who was now standing by Evelyn.

"Your Majesty is a better judge of that than I can presume to be," returned Sir George, with a queer expression on his face; "I am no artist."

"Ah, well, madame, let us hear your opinion," continued the Queen, who had laid aside the timid, repressed manner which she usually wore in the presence of a husband who too often slighted and neglected her. "Your nation has such good taste, that you ought to be a judge in such matters."

"Ah, your Majesty is *too* good, *too* amiable!" exclaimed the delighted Frenchwoman. "*Eh bien*, since your Majesty gives me leave to express my poor opinion, I must suggest in all humility that the carving of this piece is in too high relief; it gives too much of gloom, of shadow. *Mais*, if your Majesty will excuse me one little moment, I will show you *just* what I mean. I have some ivory crucifixes below, carved by the first artist in Paris—*exquis—magnifiques!* Ah, no, thank your Majesty, I cannot have them sent for, I must myself accompany the messenger; I must myself superintend the unpacking, they are so delicate, so fragile. Excuse me, your Majesty, I will be but one little moment." She bustled

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out of the room, and Evelyn turned to the Queen with an air of ill-suppressed vexation.

"Pardon me, your Majesty, but why listen to this ignorant Frenchwoman? 'Tis very evident she knows nothing about art. Too high relief, forsooth!" The Queen drew up her stately little figure with all the hauteur of her race.

"Pardon me, Mr. Evelyn, but I must be allowed *myself* to judge whom I will listen to." She turned away and began to examine some of the numerous articles which strewed the room, while Evelyn bit his lip and drew back.

There was an uncomfortable silence, during which poor Gibbons stood awkwardly by his carving, longing to withdraw, but, in his ignorance of Court etiquette, not liking to stir till his patron should give the signal. Presently the Frenchwoman reappeared, followed by a man carrying a box, and, bustling importantly up to the Queen, whispered something in her ear. Catherine looked startled, made a step or two forwards, opened her lips, as though to speak, then, changing her intention, turned once more to the Frenchwoman, saying, in a low but still audible voice:

"Are you *sure* of this, madame?"

"O yes, your Majesty," answered she, in the same tone, "I fear it is too true; the man is waiting in the ante-room. I know him well as a man of the greatest honour." The Queen turned to Mr. Evelyn.

"I am afraid, sir, we have been imposed upon," she said, gravely. "It seems that this young man has been trying to palm off another man's work as his own. Madame de Boord has just met the real artist below; having heard what was going on, he has come to ask for justice. It is a pity, sir, that your kindness should have been so abused." Evelyn

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started, cast one glance at Gibbons, in whose face astonishment and indignation were struggling with one another, then, turning to the Queen, he exclaimed:

"Impossible, madam! Either your Majesty is grossly deceived in another quarter, or else there is some great mistake, which I am sure we shall easily clear up. Why, madam, I saw Mr. Gibbons carving this very work with my own eyes——"

"Or *pretending* to carve it; there is a little of difference between the two, if your honour will pardon my saying so," broke in the Frenchwoman, pushing officiously forward. Evelyn gave her a withering look, saying, frigidly, "I was speaking to the *Queen*. Your Majesty," he went on, addressing himself once more to Catherine, "your Majesty will not think of believing these absurd calumnies. Mr. Gibbons will——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Evelyn, we must inquire into this," answered the Queen, giving a sign of assent to the Frenchwoman, who was pressing for the admittance of her *protégé*.

All eyes were turned to the door, which presently opened, giving entrance to a tall man with marked features and a brown complexion, carrying a piece of carved wood under his arm. Gibbons started at the sight, the blood rushed to his face, and he made a step forward. The newcomer was none other than his old enemy Jack Foster.

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE QUEEN'S TEST

" *Som.*—Judge you, my Lord of Warwick, then, between us.
Plant.—Tut, tut, here is a mannerly forbearance;
The truth appears so naked on my side
That any purblind eye may find it out.
Som.—And on my side it is so well apparell'd,
So clear, so shining, and so evident,
That it will glimmer through a blind man's eye.
Plant.—In dumb significants proclaim your thoughts;
Let him that is a true-born gentleman,
And stands upon the honour of his birth,
If he suppose that I have pleaded truth,
From off this briar pluck a white rose with me."
SHAKESPEARE—" Henry VI., Part I."

THE rival claimant bowed low to the Queen, who slightly acknowledged the salutation. Evidently his appearance did not create a favourable impression. In a somewhat nervous and hurried voice she stated the case, and asked Foster how, if he were the author of the carving, it came to be in Gibbons' hands.

" May it please your Majesty, the piece was stolen from me," he answered, boldly. " I used to lodge next this young man in Belle Sauvage Court, and was carving it from an old picture, when suddenly, one day during my absence, they both disappeared, and the young man vanished about the same time. We are both carvers, and he was doubtless jealous of my superior talents. See, gracious Majesty, here is a piece of wood on which I began as a trial; your Majesty will see by its resemblance to a part of the frame of this carved picture that I speak the truth." So saying, he produced a piece of wood from beneath

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his arm, which Gibbons instantly recognised as that which he had lost at the time of the fire. He was about to spring indignantly forward, when Evelyn restrained him with a warning look, and a whispered "wait." The Queen appeared perplexed. She glanced from one claimant to the other, and the look which she read on Gibbons' face evidently shook her opinion.

"Which am I to believe?" she said, with a troubled air. Then, turning suddenly to Gibbons:

"Can it *really* be that you are deceiving us? What have you to say to this man's statement?"

"I can solemnly assure your Majesty that this work, such as it is, was done by my own hand," he answered, with a strong effort at self-restraint; "I ought to know, for I have spent many a long day over it. I cannot tell how it is, but this man seems to have taken some strange dislike towards me: I will not trouble your Majesty with the history of all I have suffered at his hands, but this much I will say in my own defence, that I do not believe him capable of executing such a piece of carving as this. So far as I know him—and 'tis but little—he is a sailor, and——"

A lady stepped forward from the circle behind the Queen, and interrupted Gibbons' speech.

"May it please your Majesty, *I* can vouch for this man's skill in carving," she said, pointing to Foster. "Some years ago I laid a wager with my Lady Betty Grey that a posy could be carved in wood so cunningly as scarce to be known from nature. I gave the commission to a certain Jew in the City—I forget his name—but he sent the flowers to me by this same man here, with the information that it was the bearer who had executed them. If your Majesty permit, I will fetch them." She left the room, and presently

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re-appeared with Gibbons' long-lost pot of flowers in her hand.

The young carver could contain himself no longer. Scarcely knowing what he did, he sprang forward, exclaiming, in a voice half-choked with anger:

"My flowers, my lost flowers! So 'twas *you*, you ras——" Evelyn pressed his hand warningly on the young man's arm.

"Hush!" he said, in a whisper; "you will get yourself into trouble; remember, we are in the royal presence." The Queen looked more and more perplexed and troubled.

"I know not what to think," she said; "I would the King were here."

"Is it that your Majesty can still doubt?" exclaimed the Frenchwoman, impatiently. "Surely——"

"Will your Majesty allow me a moment?" asked Sir George Viner, the gentleman-in-waiting before mentioned, who had for some time past been looking curiously at the actors in this unusual scene. "I have not such a good memory as my Lady Springfield, but I fancy I can recall something which may be of use on the *other* side. Have I your Majesty's leave to ask Mr. Gibbons a question?"

"Surely, Sir George," answered Catherine, glad of any help in the unpleasant business before her.

"Tell me," continued the gentleman, turning to our hero, "do you remember a certain scene in the streets, some years ago, concerning a carved ebony necklace?" The Frenchwoman changed colour. Gibbons' face brightened.

"Pardon me, your honour," he answered, "'twas just that the necklace was *not* of ebony."

"Precisely," returned the gentleman, eagerly. "Then my memory has not played me false. If your

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Majesty will allow me, I will tell you a tale about this same Madame de Boord (I am well-nigh certain 'twas she) and Mr. Evelyn's *protégé* here." The Queen assented, and Sir George was proceeding to relate the incident, when the Frenchwoman broke in hurriedly:

"Madame, this gentleman mistakes himself. I assure you it was not me. Surely your Majesty knows me too well to suppose——"

"'Twas she, your Majesty, none other," exclaimed Gibbons, eager to take advantage of the diversion Sir George had made in his favour; but he was interrupted in his turn by Foster, who broke in hotly—"Do not listen to him, gracious Majesty; it suits him to take away this good lady's character, but on my word it is not fit that he should so much as *speak* to your Majesty. He is an escaped prisoner, gracious Majesty, and has been in hiding from justice this long while. I was myself a witness against him, when he was up before the magistrate for treason—for betraying the secrets of our navy to the Hollanders. Beware of him, gracious Majesty; he is a Dutch spy." The Queen started back and turned pale.

"A Dutch spy!" she gasped.

Again Evelyn came forward. "Madam," he said, earnestly, "I am convinced that there is some monstrous mistake here. I know nothing of what this man means by his talk of spies and so forth; but from what I know of Mr. Gibbons, I am convinced that he is grossly calumniated; and from what Sir George Viner has told us of this French madam, it seems to me that she and her friends are worthy of no credit."

"Indeed, madam, they are not," added Sir George eagerly. "I will stake my word on the honesty of this young man." The Queen looked much agitated.

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"I cannot do anything more," she said, nervously. "It is impossible, quite impossible. This is a matter for the King to settle; his Majesty must act here, I cannot. Tell me, sir," she continued, turning to Evelyn with an appealing air, very different to what she had shown towards him at the beginning of the interview, "what must I do? This man has spoken of treason—of spies. Ought I to have Mr. Gibbons arrested? I would much rather not act, but——"

The poor little Queen's stately manner was all gone; her voice trembled, and the dark eyes raised to Evelyn's face were full of tears. Kept in the background by King Charles, accustomed to be treated as a mere state-puppet, she was little able to take her own place in any affair out of the ordinary course. Spite of his annoyance, Evelyn could not find it in his heart to be angry with her.

"Nay, madam, there is no need for you to do anything of that sort," he said, soothingly; and taking her aside, they conversed for some moments in a low voice. When they returned to the circle, Catherine appeared much relieved.

"I must dismiss you all for the present," she said. "This is an affair which his Majesty must settle; you will be summoned before him shortly, and he will see full justice done to every one. Mr. Evelyn has kindly promised to take charge of the cartoon in the meanwhile. And," she added graciously, smiling through her tears, "that you may not say your Queen is uninterested in the matter, I will give you something to do, which will put the skill of both claimants to the test. See," she continued, taking a couple of roses from a vase which stood near, and holding them out towards the rival artists; "carve me these in wood, and bring them with you when his

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Majesty summons you again to Court. There are some lovely roses in the frame of this cartoon, and methinks I can judge from the manner of carving which of you has done them. Adieu, gentlemen. Sir George, you will see that every one retires quietly."

She bowed slightly, and withdrew.

The Court ladies whispered together. Madame de Boord and Foster looked disconcerted; he stood for an instant twirling his rose by the stem, and then seemed about to address Gibbons angrily, but, on a sign from the Frenchwoman, changed his purpose and retired.

Evelyn called in the porters, and, ordering them to carry the cartoon back to Sir Richard Browne's chamber, placed his hand on Gibbons' arm and drew him out of the room.

"Never mind," he said, cheerfully, "never mind, my lad; don't be disheartened: 'twill soon be cleared up, I doubt not." Gibbons did not answer, and Evelyn, turning his head to look at the young man's face, almost started at the expression of indignation and distress with which every feature was quivering. They were alone in one of the long corridors. Evelyn stopped, and laid his hand kindly on Gibbons' shoulder.

"Indeed you must not take it so much to heart, my lad," he said; "I have an engagement at present, but will look in this evening, and you shall explain everything to me; I *know* you can do so, for do not think for a moment that I believe a single word of the tale those people have forged against you. You have only to speak plainly to me, and I will explain everything to the King. The Queen, poor lady, is easily influenced, but I will soon put things straight with his Majesty. Now, my lad, I must go. Work away at the Queen's rose, and keep up your spirits. Never

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fear, we will give the rascal the lie to his face. You know the way out?" Gibbons bowed his head, and Evelyn returned towards the Queen's apartments.

Our hero was just about to leave the palace, when he heard some one running behind him. "Stop a moment!" cried a panting voice, and, turning his head, Gibbons saw Sir George Viner hurrying towards him.

"Mr. Gibbons," he said, "I wanted to speak to you before, but could not leave the Queen's apartments till they were cleared. I want to tell you, Mr. Gibbons, that I will stand by you through this business. You did me a good turn about that necklace, and I don't forget it, on my word I don't. We courtiers are too much used to varnished words and crooked dealings; but I admire such truth and honesty as yours, by my faith I do. I should like nothing better than to see that French baggage and her rascally friend shamed before His Majesty and all the Court, and they shall be too, if I can do anything to bring it about. Mr. Gibbons," continued the kind-hearted courtier, hesitating a little, and feeling in his pocket, "what do you say to putting 'sold' on your picture, in the face of everything and everybody? I should like—that is, if you do not prefer waiting to see whether his Majesty will take it——"

"No," said Gibbons, in a short, proud voice, "I will not sell it to either of their Majesties *now*."

"Well," continued Sir George; "I won £80 from his Grace of Buckingham at cards last night; I know the picture is worth three times the money, but if you will let me have it for that, I shall be proud; and it will be something to say you have sold it off at once, in spite of them." Gibbons' face lighted; the courtier's frankness and kind offer were as balm to his wounded pride.

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"I thank you, Sir George," he answered gratefully; "'tis right kindly done on your part, and I accept the offer with all my heart. I do not think you will repent your bargain, sir; I have spent many a long hour over that work; it has had my utmost pains, my utmost care——" He broke off with a sigh.

"Well, I suppose I must see Mr. Evelyn about my purchase?" said Sir George; "'tis in his hands, I believe, is it not?" Gibbons assented; and the gay courtier, nodding his farewell, went off, singing a serenade of Sir William Davenant's:

> "Awake, awake, the morn will never rise
> Till she can dress her beauty at your eyes;
> Awake, awake——"

Gibbons heard him carolling as he left the palace, and the sound jarred on his ear. Poor lad, his heart was little attuned to music at that moment.

"*Again!* it is hard that that villain should have tried to snatch it from me *again*, just when I thought success was in my grasp! And yet I thought I was ready for whatever might come. I fancied I could have borne it better. Ah, when shall I learn Dr. Wren's lesson?" thought poor Gibbons, sadly, as he retraced his steps towards Deptford.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

How Grinling Gibbons Climbed to the Top of the Ladder

"*Ant.*—Sweet lady, you have given me life and living;
For here I read for certain that my ships
Are safely come to road."
SHAKESPEARE—"The Merchant of Venice."

One morning, about a week after the events just mentioned, there came a knock at the door of the little cottage by the river, and on Gibbons opening, he found Mr. Evelyn outside, with a look of great excitement on his face.

"The message has come, Mr. Gibbons," he said, quickly; "his Majesty summons you to appear before him this morning, and Silvio too—as a witness, you know. Come, get ready at once, my coach is waiting outside. Is the rose finished?" he added, hastily.

Gibbons went to his bench and took the flower from a heap of delicate wood-shavings which lay there. He held it up to Mr. Evelyn, but his hand trembled so that every leaf and petal of the dainty blossom quivered, as under a summer's breeze.

Evelyn took it in his hand, with an involuntary cry of admiration. It was carved out of a piece of white satin-wood, delicately perfumed, which he had himself brought from abroad, and was finished with such exquisite skill as to be scarcely distinguishable from its living type, which still bloomed in a glass of water on the carver's bench.

"Admirable, my lad! Excellent!" exclaimed the delighted patron. "The Queen's rose to the very

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life! Ah, this will convince the whole Court who is the real author of the cartoon, as surely as ever Solomon's sword did in the matter of the living babe. Why, any one with half an eye might have guessed, merely by comparing your hands! Who could dream of such dainty work coming out of that man's great clumsy fists, while yours——" He took the lad's long, sensitive fingers in his, but started at the touch. They were icy cold, and trembling like a leaf.

"Come, come, Mr. Gibbons, this won't do; you are as nervous as any guilty culprit! Put on a bold face, man! Nothing like assurance for creating a good impression in such a case as this! We shall carry you through triumphantly, never fear!"

"I hope so, sir; it helps me more than I can say, that *you* believe I have spoken truth. But somehow, sir, nothing seems to go right with me; I am trying to prepare myself this time, but——"

"Tut, tut, man! always hope for the best. Faint heart never won fair lady; know you that? And Fortune is a coy coquette, only to be won by the bold. For the rest, I am pledged not to betray secrets, but——," he smiled meaningly, instead of concluding the sentence, and began packing the rose in a case which he had brought with him for the purpose. "Come, my lad, get ready; my horses are getting impatient. Good morrow, my sweet musician," he continued, as Silvio entered the room. "See that your friend looks his best; and you too—don all your fine feathers, for I am going to carry you both to Court this very minute. Hey! Presto!" He added something in Italian which made the Savoyard show his white teeth in a brilliant smile, as he retired with Gibbons into the inner room.

"See, the sun comes out! A good omen for you,

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Mr. Gibbons," exclaimed Evelyn, as the carriage drove under the great gateway of the palace.

"I would, though, you had not disposed of the cartoon. His Majesty would certainly have bought it if you come off clear to-day: he could not have done less; and even now you are not bound in law to Sir George. No one has a right to dispose of goods which are in litigation; know you that, sir?"

"I never thought of it," answered Gibbons; "but I have no wish to be off my bargain, whatever may happen. I had rather Sir George Viner had my work than any one—excepting you, sir," he added with a smile.

"Ah! you never gave me the chance, Mr. Gibbons," returned Evelyn as he stepped from the coach. "But now to the King. Remember, fortune favours the brave."

Again they traversed the brilliant suites of apartments, but Gibbons had no eyes for their magnificence this time. His heart was beating too fast, his brain was too full of busy, apprehensive thoughts for him to give any attention to outward things.

At the door of the presence-chamber Evelyn paused, and turned to the two lads with a reassuring smile. "Courage!" he whispered. There was time for no more, for at that moment the door was thrown open, and they were ushered into the royal presence.

"Now or never," thought Gibbons, and the very consciousness that this was the supreme moment of his life made him appear, at least outwardly, calm.

"After all," he said to himself, "why should I fear? I am innocent, and not all the cleverly woven lies can make me otherwise. My cause is in higher hands than those of any earthly king, I will trust it so without fear."

As he entered the room he was aware of a buzz of

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many voices, and a blaze of brilliant colouring. The King and Queen were sitting in state at the upper end of the room, surrounded by all their Court, who apparently expected considerable amusement from the approaching examination into the claims of the rival carvers, for they whispered to each other and cast curious glances, now at Gibbons and Silvio, now at the carved cartoon, which was placed near the King's chair. Charles beckoned to Evelyn, and said something to him in a low voice. Then there was a pause. Fans fluttered and silks rustled among the Queen's ladies, and every eye was turned towards the door. The King looked impatient.

"How is this?" he asked, turning to a gentleman on his right hand. "Are you sure my message was delivered to the Frenchwoman and the other carver?"

"I have no doubt it was, your Majesty; but I will inquire." He retired, and the lull of expectation fell again on the company. Charles fidgeted in his seat, now addressing a word to Evelyn, now caressing one or other of the little spaniels which were his constant companions. The Queen leant back in her chair and played with her fan.

Gibbons and Silvio stood side by side, waiting. The Italian's quick black eyes wandered over the faces gathered before him, as though to read how each was affected towards his friend; and Gibbons, who during this pause had almost entirely recovered his composure, was beginning to follow his example, and had recognised both Sir George Viner and Dr. Wren among those present, when the door opened, and the gentleman returned.

"May it please your Majesty," he said, going up to the King, "the messengers have come back, but they have been unable to find either Madame de Boord or

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John Foster. The former, it appears, packed up in all haste and returned to France some days since; and the latter has disappeared, no one knows where."

There was a great sensation among the company, and several faces expressed disappointment. Charles raised his eyebrows.

"So!" said he with a low whistle. "Well, Evelyn, you were right after all! I thought as much! Your fine French madam has shown her true colours, Catherine. Oddsfish, 'twas a bold cheat! We owe you many apologies, Mr. Gibbons," he continued, turning to the carver; "this shows plainly enough what manner of people your accusers were. By my faith, I am sorry they were listened to for one moment, and I am sure her Majesty regrets it as much as I do."

The Queen turned to Gibbons with a winning smile. "Indeed, Mr. Gibbons, I must ask your pardon for the pain and trouble this misunderstanding has caused you; I have been much deceived in Madame de Boord. But, indeed, I do not think I could have believed *anything* against you, had I known what his Majesty has since told me, that it was you who saved my little Leah."

Gibbons started and glanced hurriedly round the circle, but the King immediately claimed his attention by saying, warmly:

"That brave deed was not done in vain, Mr. Gibbons. Even had your enemies appeared this morning we were already convinced of your innocence, and were prepared to thrust the lie down their throats. And this full justification you owe to Mistress Leah; she has told us——"

There was a stir among the ladies clustered behind the Queen's chair, and a slight, dark-haired girl came

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forward, and looked appealingly at her. The King turned round, and a few words passed between the three in an undertone; then the Queen placed her hand on the girl's arm and said something very earnestly. She shook her head.

"No," she said aloud, but with a tremor in her voice. "No; your Majesties are very kind, but I must say it myself; it is due to him—as an atonement. Simeon Benoni's daughter must right this wrong, since he is not alive to do it himself; it cannot harm him now." And with a low but perfectly distinct utterance, downcast eyes, and a painful flush, deepening as she went on, the girl proceeded to unfold the whole history of the base deceit which her father and Jack Foster had practised on the unsuspecting carver. How at first each had played into the other's hands; Foster, the bolder and sharper of the two, deceiving the Jew in his turn, by pretending to buy the carvings cheap, when in reality they were stolen; till on Simeon's discovering this, and taxing him with it, Foster, by threatening to reveal several little transactions which had lately come to his knowledge—very lucrative, indeed, but scarcely calculated to bear the light—had obtained such power over the old man as to bend him to anything he wished, even to appearing as a false witness against Gibbons when accused of treason against the Government.

Gibbons stood perfectly still while the girl was making this public reparation, but the corners of his tightly compressed lips quivered with emotion, and his breath came short and quick. He could see by her flushing face and the nervous clasping and unclasping of the little hands, by the low, hurried voice repeating sentence after sentence in the same tone, like a lesson which she had schooled herself to rehearse

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to the very end, all that this public avowal was costing her; and the knowledge that this timid, shrinking girl was facing the whole assembled Court, bearing the shame of another's deed, by this full and open confession for his sake, was almost more than he could bear. More than once he was on the point of stepping forward and entreating her to stop, but the thought that it was better for all parties that the whole should now be known, withheld him; and, with a feeling of pain and confusion almost unendurable, he heard her in silence to the end.

At last the bitter tale was all told, and with both hands before her burning face the girl shrank back among her companions. For a moment there was not a sound in the room, and many of the most careless faces looked grave and thoughtful. Then Gibbons made a step forwards. Every eye was turned upon him, but his lip quivered so that for an instant he could not speak, and when he did, it was only to say, "I thank you, Mistress Leah!" But there was a deep undertone in the simple words for which the trembling girl felt that the price she had paid had not been too great.

"Ah, Mr. Gibbons, we have forgotten the rose!" said the Queen presently, making a diversion for which every one was grateful. "We no longer need it as a proof of your ability, but that is no reason we should be deprived of the pleasure of seeing it."

Gibbons presented the box to the Queen, and there was a universal buzz of admiration when she produced the exquisite model. Every one must touch it for themselves, to be convinced that it was not a real flower, and each lady was eager to become a purchaser; but the Queen would not part with her white rose.

"No, no," she said, graciously, "I must keep this

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as a remembrance, if Mr. Gibbons will allow me. My test, it seems, would have been more than sufficient to convince the most unbelieving, even without my little maiden's testimony. You must let me redeem the token, Mr. Gibbons," she continued, placing a heavy gold chain around the carver's neck; "though I fear this is scarcely an equivalent."

"Well," said the King, with a smile, "now her Majesty has finished *her* part of the business, I may be allowed to have *my* say; though I fear I am not to be equally fortunate with her in obtaining immediate possession of a piece of Mr. Gibbons' beautiful work. I hear Sir George Viner has been beforehand with me; you might have allowed me a little more time, Mr. Gibbons, for I had set my heart on that cartoon."

"If your Majesty would really——" began Sir George, but the King interrupted him.

"No, no, my good friend, I will not deprive you of your bargain; it was my own fault, I ought to have secured it at once. Mr. Gibbons must have the kindness to make up for this disappointment by decorating our castle of Windsor with some of his beautiful work; Dr. Wren tells me also that he has need of his help with the wood-work of St. Paul's; we are indeed fortunate in securing the services of two such artists," continued Charles, with that winning grace of manner which gained the Stuarts so many hearts. "And Mr. Gibbons will, I trust, allow me to make some little amends for all the trouble and pain we have unintentionally made him suffer; it is not much, but it is all that lies in our power. Mistress Leah," he continued, turning to the circle of ladies, and holding out a casket bound in morocco and clasped with silver, "it is only fit that he should receive this slight compensation from *your* hands."

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The King's eyes twinkled as he said this, and a meaning smile, reflected from the royal countenance, went round the circle, but neither Mistress Leah nor Gibbons saw it. Bending on one knee, he received the case from her hands, opened it, and beheld an exquisite set of carving-tools, engraved with the name of:

"Grinling Gibbons,
*Carver to the King."**

I cannot tell you how Gibbons spoke his thanks: in fact, he scarcely knew himself; nor how he retired again to Silvio's side, holding the royal gift in his hand —that gift which was to be his passport to fame and honour—which he had received through little Mistress Leah, the daughter of his old tyrant of former days.

Former days! oh, how far off they seemed now, with their toils and struggles and disappointments! How small and trifling it all seemed when compared to the joy of this long-dreamed-of day! and yet the young man felt, with a wondering gratitude, that without those dark days this could never have come to pass; that each check, each disappointment which he had thought so bitter at the time had been a link in the heaven-wrought chain of circumstances which had led him step by step to this the crowning hour of his life. Mistress Leah's face—the same sweet, innocent face which he had seen so often in dreams, since that parting in the burning city—the bright tools in their open case—the gay crowd around the King and Queen—all seemed to gleam and tremble through a strange mist before his eyes. Through the same mist he saw, without heeding, that Silvio was called away

* In reality Gibbons did not obtain this post till the reign of George I.

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from his side; heard, in the same confused sort of way, the sound of voices, and only awakened to full consciousness as the chords of the grand old chorale, which Silvio had played at their first meeting, rang full and clear through the room, to find his friend standing before the King and Queen, holding a violin, while a foreign-looking musician, with an expression of rapt enthusiasm on his rugged countenance, was beating time softly with both hands, by his side.

"It was my thanksgiving for you, *caro*," whispered the Italian as they left the royal presence. "The King asked me to play, and I could think of nothing but that."

Once in the ante-room, a perfect torrent of congratulations burst upon Gibbons. Not only his old friends, but a host of others, pressed forward to shake him by the hand and congratulate him on his success. He found plenty to rejoice with him in his prosperity, but sweeter to him than all the rest was the hearty grasp of good Mr. Evelyn's hand, and the bright look on Dr. Wren's face, with which he whispered, so that none but the young carver might hear, "So we shall work together after all. The fire has made way for my cathedral, and has given you, not indeed old carvings to repair, but new ones to execute. Did I not say that if He above wanted us, we should not be left to rust?"

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CONCLUSION

" The awakened city's roar
Chased the phantoms I had summoned
Back into their graves once more."
LONGFELLOW—" The Belfry of Bruges."

THE picture of the past, which I have been trying to weave with fresh colours from the faded tapestry of long ago, is now finished; but as I fancy you may like to know what became of the people who figure therein, I will, instead of cutting off the threads at the edge of the last scene, endeavour to trace them to their true end.

The outlines become very uncertain, the colours very dim, and it is difficult to distinguish the figures we know from a crowd of others with whom we have at present nothing to do. But as I gaze at the " mingling shapes " on the old tapestry, I fancy I can make out a bridal procession, in which the Merry Monarch and his quiet little Portuguese wife are taking a prominent part; and no wonder, for the dark-eyed little bride is evidently one of the Queen's maidens. She is walking up the aisle of the Chapel Royal by the side of a tall, curly-haired young man in gala attire, who is looking down upon her sweet child-face with a very happy expression on his honest, open countenance. Look at them closely, and I think you will agree with me that they are very like our two friends, Mistress Leah, the little Christian Jewess, and Grinling Gibbons, the carver. Mr. Evelyn, Dr. Wren, Sir George Viner, and most of our old friends are grouped around; and in the choir, holding violins,

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and evidently putting their whole souls into the bridal-march which they are playing, stand two musicians, who can be none other than Signor Nicolao and Silvio Doria.

Looking along the tapestry, I still see those two figures, always with violins, first together, then the younger standing where the elder used to be; from which I am inclined to imagine that Silvio became first the pupil and afterwards the successor of the famous violinist.

The life-threads of Madame de Boord and Jack Foster are much harder to trace. Her figure never appears again among the gay scenes of the English Court; but a face very like his looms through the smoke of a sea-fight, lying dead on the deck of a ship, whether English or Dutch I cannot make out. As for old Simeon Benoni, I find no further trace of him, and must conclude that his was the charred and blackened body, with two money-bags still clutched between its stiffened hands, which was found by the workmen in clearing away the ruins of Cheapside.

To discover the life-story of Mr. Evelyn and Dr. (afterwards Sir Christopher) Wren, no spectacles of mine are needed. *Their* figures stand out bright and clear on the historical tapestry, honourable and honoured to the last by all who know how to appreciate good and true men. It is pleasant to notice in Evelyn's Diary the constant kindly admiration with which he mentions "the incomparable carving of our Gibbons," and to find that the artist gratefully remembered the unfailing kindness of his first patron by presenting him with his bust carved in wood.

The carved cartoon, which forms the centre-piece of our picture, was indeed, as Foster had enviously foretold, "the making of Gibbons." Since the day

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his talent was publicly acknowledged at Court, the tide of fortune never ceased to flow for him; and some of the most magnificent buildings in England—Windsor, Chatsworth, Burleigh, Petworth, Lime Park, &c., boast of his carvings as their greatest treasures. But the crowning honour of this our greatest carver was the fulfilling of his own wish in being allowed to work with our greatest architect in raising a shrine to the glory of God in the midst of restored London; and as we look at his exquisite carvings in the choir of St. Paul's, we may apply those words to Grinling Gibbons also which form the epitaph of Sir Christopher Wren:

"SI MONUMENTUM QUÆRIS, CIRCUMSPICE!"

For truly, by the persevering employment of their talents in promoting the glory of God, have both these great men found the surest way of perpetuating their own.

THE END

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